MOMMA AND OTHER UNIMPORTANT PEOPLE

RUPERT HUGHES

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"MOMMA"
AND OTHER UNIMPORTANT PEOPLE

Books by

RUPERT HUGHES

MOMMA, AND OTHER UNIMPORTANT PEOPLE
WHAT'S THE WORLD COMING TO?
THE CUP OF FURY
CLIPPED WINGS
EMPTY POCKETS
THE FAIRY DETECTIVE
IN A LITTLE TOWN
THE LAST ROSE OF SUMMER
LONG EVER AGO
THE OLD NEST
THE THIRTEENTH COMMANDMENT
THE UNPARDONABLE SIN
WE CAN'T HAVE EVERYTHING
WHAT WILL PEOPLE SAY?

HARPER & BROTHERS, NEW YORK
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"MOMMA"

AND OTHER UNIMPORTANT PEOPLE

BY

RUPERT HUGHES

Author of

"WHAT'S THE WORLD COMING TO?"

"WHAT WILL PEOPLE SAY?"

"THE CUP OF FURY" ETC.

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"MOMMA"
AND OTHER UNIMPORTANT PEOPLE

"MOMMA"

AND OTHER UNIMPORTANT PEOPLE

I

MOMMA

MOMMA was sick, right sick. Momma was awful sick! Momma looked like she was going to die any minute. And she didn't care if she did. She up and as good as told Poppa that.

Poppa was scared almost to death when he realized it. He was all alone with her, and had none of the childern to talk to about it; though, for the matter of that, Momma and Poppa had never told the childern about their own ailments. And now the childern had growed up and vamoosed. All that was left of the fact that there ever had been any childern round the place was the two old names Momma and Poppa that the old folks had caught by contagion and got to calling each other by from hearing themselves called them by the childern when they were childern.

Momma and Poppa had been drifting down life like a pair of old mud turtles floating south on a water-logged log. And now all of a sudden one of them felt that the other'n was going to roll off into the muddy water and sink downward, backward, dead!

Perhaps the poor turtles know and grieve and mourn to the full capacity of their tight shells.

But Poppa was a human, gifted with sympathy. He was old acquaintances with grief of every sort, a pitiful postgraduate in all a man knows who has been a lover, a husband, and a father, and has seen children born from one pain and ache to another and another, who has seen some of his own little children die, or pray for death in the long procession of disappointments and thwarted hopes that begin with the first irretrievable rattle lost over the edge of the crib, and pass on to the rainy holidays, the sunny school days, the warm Christmases, cracked dolls, lost games, indignities from parents who misunderstand and spank, from sweethearts who misunderstand and flirt, and so on and so forth to the dreary, shabby camp-follower sorrows that trudge along at the tail end of the parade.

Poppa's habit had been to take things as they come, because, as somebody said, that's the only way they come. He had grown so jaded with existence that he became a veteran Horatio, who, as Will Shakespeare said, "fortune's buffets and rewards hath ta'en with equal thanks."

Nothing had excited him much of late at the store, at home, at church, the lodge, or in the newspapers. As he had worn what seemed to be the same suit of clothes for years, so his face had worn the same suit of expressions. It was hard to tell his smile from his scowl. Funny things all had a touch of misfortune in them for somebody, and sad things were all kind of funny, so the same twitch at the muscles about his mouth served for an acknowledgment of everything unusual.

But now, when Momma almost wisht she was dead, that last dreadful word twitched Poppa's very heart. He felt as if in the calm slumber of habitude somebody had reached into his breast and given his heart a yank. And it shivered and rattled as an old doorbell clamors pulled hard at midnight by somebody crying: "Wake up! Your house is on fire!"

Poppa woke up. Instinct told him that he must save Momma and himself from the incredible disaster of her death. His business worries had kept him from noticing the little symptoms of her decline, though she had stopped quarreling with him and had simply quarreled with life, with everything—the food, the neighbors, her clothes, the weather, her stummick, her head, her eyes, her feet, her hands, her appetite, her looks—she even complained of her looks!

And now, as if scales had been scraped off his eyes, Poppa saw that Momma didn't look good. She didn't look a bit good. She looked something scandalous.

Poppa belonged to a lodge and he had gone to numberless funerals. Yet he had hardly even imagined that some day his fellow members might in turn come to his house, all dressed up with sashes and plumes and swørds, to march alongside the black wagon that should carry his one woman in a box to a ditch.

As if some one had set a moving picture going against the wall of his own setting room, he saw the whole thing, and he shuddered back from it with a cry that struck inward and cut downward and stuck. He had a fishbone in his throat.

He became suddenly young and arrantly afraid. He wanted to run to his wife and cling to her and beg her not to think of such things. But he had given up the habit of hugging Momma or taking her into his lap or sitting on the arm of her chair, since the ancient days when the first child began to take notice.

He wanted to go back to the old ways, but it would have looked foolish, and the two frumps had been afraid of each other's love for years and years.

He did nothing and said nothing; but he did a heap of thinking. "Heap" was the word, for his thoughts were like a pile of dead leaves, tarnished, crumpled brown leaves, that had been green and radiant and breathing once.

His thoughts were a heap of autumnal rubbish set on fire. Red torment ran through them, and they writhed and twisted as if a new life had come back to them just that they might suffer a little more.

The terror stung him to a determination. "I'll call the doctor," he said. He rose from his chair and shuffled to the telephone. Momma ran after him and dragged his hands down, crying: "I don't want to see that old fool. I'll go jump in the river if you send for him. I couldn't stand the sight of him."

"When a woman's too sick to see the doctor," Poppa said, "it's high time somebody called him in."

He backed round and bunted her away with the minimum of grace and the maximum of devotion, and held her at a distance until he got the number.

Momma flopped helplessly into a chair and cried like a petulant little girl, while Poppa ordered the doctor to put on his shoes and come right over.

She was still pouting like a little girl when Doctor Noxon came. Her lips were pushed out and her chin was purse-drawn when he asked her what was the matter of her. He held her wrist in one hand and his watch in the other, glanced at her tongue, and in a lowered voice asked one or two very personal questions.

Poppa did most of the talking, while Doctor Noxon nodded, and said, "I see, I see." As might have been expected, he left two sets of pills, one kind to be taken after each meal and before retiring, and another kind of pill to be taken on arising and every three hours.

Momma could hardly keep from laughing in the old owl's face, and as soon as he closed the door she bust right out. It was not a nice laugh—hysterics like. She whooped: "I've seen that old nuisance leave those same fool pills on those same fool pieces of paper since we first come to Carthage and called him in. Everybody that ever took 'em has died, and I guess it's my turn! And I don't care!"

Her laughter ended in the wild weeping of a young girl, and Poppa was almost distracted. She went to bed all wore out, but she couldn't sleep.

She kept him awake worse when she laid still trying not to wake him than she did when she thrashed about and groaned.

That was a long night, and Poppa entertained a whole herd of nightmares without falling asleep, or, if he did, he didn't know it and it didn't do him a mite of good.

He waited a day or two to see what effect Doctor Noxon's immemorial pills would have. They had even less effect than he expected they would.

The third day he took the almost sacrilegious step of seeing one of the other doctors. Doctor Champe refused to call since Mrs. Lundy was known to be one of Doctor Noxon's regular customers, a life member in his pill association.

But Poppa threatened to brain Champe if he didn't see Momma, and he consented to see her if she would call after dark. Poppa had to drag her there "like a pig to market," he said, and he was more wore out than what she was.

Doctor Champe gave spoon medicines. They were bittersweet and sticky, and had no effect whatever except to cause a brief ague of nausea and leave a nasty taste on the tongue.

A third doctor tried massage, another electricity. Momma even flirted with science—science with a capital S. But the optimism that was ladled out to her made her sicker than Doctor Champe's sticky sweet medicine.. She was in one of those moods when a cheerful word or a smile is a deadly insult.

The last doctor in town advised a trip, a change of climate and environment. Momma ridiculed the idea, but Poppa telegraphed their married daughter in Terre Haute that Momma was coming, and he fairly boosted her on the train.

Momma was dismal, and ashamed of being dumped as a burden on a daughter she had always babied even after Hattie (now Mrs. Fred Eppes) had babies of her own. So the reunion lacked the delight that belonged to the occasion.

Hattie hugged her mother hard, and squealed, "Why, Momma, you're looking fine!"

Momma was doleful enough to remember her own woes, and she groaned: "You just say that! I

don't feel a bit good and I'm a sight! Don't show me to any of your swell Terra Hut friends, for I'll disgrace you."

Hattie had hard sledding before her. Her mother did not even want to cheer up. She wanted to be sick, and she doubled her misery by bewailing the fact that she couldn't throw off her gloom. She tried to smile once or twice, but Hattie begged her not to.

Since Momma would neither go calling nor receive callers, she was not easy to entertain. She was ashamed of her shabby clothes and her dowdy appearance, and so was Hattie.

Hattie would not admit it, though she did say that Poppa, with all his money, ought to dress her up better. Poor Poppa had tried to. The average American husband does not often get the chance to complain of his wife's thrift in clothes, but Mr. Lundy, little as he noticed such things, had finally urged Momma to spend a little more money on duds, now that the children were buying their own. But his well-meant hints had only depressed her the more, and she had retorted that he was sick and tired of her and her old face.

He had dropped the subject. Hattie had no better success. All that she succeeded in accomplishing was a round of the Terra Haute physicians—especially of those frightful personages known as "specialists." Each of these found his specialty in Momma, and went after it. One of them got away with a large number of her teeth before she could fight him off.

Others offered to remove various parts of her, but she declined to be separated from any more of her fixtures.

She reduced Hattie's general practitioner almost

to nervous prostration, and at last, in order to get her off his hands and off her daughter's nerves, he heartily recommended a New York specialist, Doctor Courtneidge, who had the monopoly on a very abstruse operation dealing with the pancreas or something that Momma didn't even know she had.

She was quite overawed at finding herself the proud possessor of such a thing. She felt like an old watch that has suddenly learned it has had jeweled movements all these years. But after a few hours of being interested in herself she slumped again and said she guessed she'd take her old pancreas back to Carthage with her. She'd got along with it so far, and, seeing as she'd denied herself a trip to New York all her life for fun, she certainly wa'n't going all that ways to let a doctor poke a knife into her.

Hattie fumed and bullied in vain, for a day or two, then she fired off a telegram to Poppa to come over at once.

Poppa was putting through a big land deal and the telegram nearly jolted him out of his wits. He would not wait to extend his option. He ran down to the station and swung on a train just pulling out. He did not even stop for the collar, toothbrush, and nightgown that constituted his usual going-away equipment.

He spent a horrible night in the smoking car, sleeping among his distorted limbs like a wrecked grasshopper. At Terre Haute he took a taxicab to Hattie's house, and was in such a mental and facial disarray when he rang the bell that the maid who answered it slammed the door on him and ran to tell her mistress that there was a crazy man on the porch.

Hattie peeked through the little side window and recognized her father, and flung open the door and her arms to him.

He expected to find Momma on her deathbed, but she was at breakfast, crying into her rolled oats.

"What on earth is the matter of you, Momma?" he gasped.

"Nothing's the matter of me," she snapped. "What on earth's the matter of you? Had your breakfast? Seddown! And—Hattie, could you ask your girl to fry him a negg—turned over, you remember; and if the coffee's out, here you can have the rest of mine."

Poppa sank into a chair and consented to break his fast while the news was broken to him. The word "pancreas" dazed him. It sounded like something for breakfast till Hattie explained. Then he was convinced. There is a power about a new word that solves all mysteries for most people, and Poppa was very much like most people.

When Hattie had explained that Doctor Appleyard himself had settled upon the pancreas and its malfunctioning, or something like that, as the secret of Momma's indomitable obscurities, Poppa set his jaw.

"When's first train to N'York?" he asked.

"I'm not goin', I tell you," Momma pealed. "I'm not goin' one step."

"You are goin'!" Poppa stormed. "Why ain't you goin'?"

"Because it costs too much money."

That is a thing a man likes to say for himself. He cannot endure to hear anyone else tell it to him. It is insulting. When the children were young, Momma had always said it first when she wanted

to make sure of his consenting to an expenditure. Things she would never have browbeaten or wept him into permitting, she could always force him to force her to accept by that approach—using the word "force" as card tricksters do when they deftly permit you to drag from them the one card that will work the trick.

But now Momma was not stacking the cards. She had economized for so many decades that money had become a thing sacrosanct. Unwittingly she had dealt Poppa the deadliest humiliation in her power, for he was what Carthage people called "rich"; he had lands and lands in his own and Momma's name, and big sums out on mortgages.

A standard of living that had been forced on him by his early poverty had sufficed him in his gradual wealth.

A new suit of clothes was a nuisance. Extra servants were like unwelcome guests that never went home. The simplest food everlastingly repeated was all his stomach craved.

Momma would as soon have had the measles as a limousine, and jewels on her fingers would have crippled her like inflammatory rheumatism. The changing styles of Paris interested her as much as the tides of Barnegat. She had not changed the manner of wearing her hair since she was a mother for the first time, and her dresses were made by a sewing woman who was more interested in the gossip of the families she moved among than in the daily hints from Paris.

With money pouring in in amounts whose importance neither husband nor wife ever thought of translating into luxuries, and seeping out in a slow

trickle, the old couple had come near to being misers without dreaming of stinginess.

This last big land deal of Poppa's had brought him to a sudden realization that he was a pretty big fellow. The banks had begun to turn to him with opportunities for large turnovers, and bonds were offered him in bundles.

And so when Momma implied that a trip to New York, to save her life, maybe, was beyond his means, he was hurt and enraged, and in his anger he rose to an eloquence of gallantry he never would have achieved in a more temperate mood.

"Too much money, hey? You think you can't afford it, do you? Well, let me tell you that I can afford to send you to any town that anybody else can afford to go to. And if that old pankers' doctor has got any patients at tall besides millionaires, and if he don't charge more 'n a hunderd thousand dollars a patient, you can have the best operation he's got in his shop."

Momma braced up a bit at this and gave Hattie a proud look, as much as to say, "You haven't married the only successful man in the world, Mrs. Eppes." But she shook her head.

"You ain't goin' to bankrupt yourself shippin' me to any doctor, for I'm not worth it. And that's all there is about it."

"Not worth it?" Poppa cried, with the fervor, if not the rhetoric, of a Romeo. "Well, if you ain't worth it, I'd like to know who is? All I got is none too much to spend on you. And if I had ten times as much, what 'd it be worth if I lost you, Momma?"

This was so poetic and beautiful that Momma had

to get mad or break down and beller, so she put up a big fight.

"Oh, that's all very well for you to say, but what it it comes down to is, you're sending me away to die like a dawg outside somewheres; you want to treat me the way they do the old rats that they give a poison to that guarantees they don't die in the house."

"Aw, Momma!" was all Poppa could groan. But Hattie lit into her mother with all the vigor of a true and dutiful American child.

"Why, Momma Lundy! You ought to be ashamed of yourself. You must be out of your mind to talk thataway when Poppa is so nice and so worried."

"That's right! Pick on me!" Momma moaned, taking unfair refuge in cowardly tears. "But I notice nobody is offering to go to New York with me."

Hattie spoke first. "I'd go in a minute if I could leave the children, but with little Eddie having his tonsils removed to-morrow and Fannie's chickenpox just coming out—"

Poppa sighed. "I'll go, of course, if you want me to."

Momma saw the reluctance in his assent, and, though she knew that he had some strong business reason behind it, her cantankerous mood took umbrage at it.

"What 'd I tell you? Well, I will go. I'll go all by myself, to some lonely old hotel, and if I never come back nobody will know the difference."

"Of course you sha'n't go by yourself, honey," Poppa protested. "I was only thinkin' that if I could go home for a while I could set my business to rights and prob'ly close up a big deal I had on when I got Hattie's wire. If I was to put that

through, it would net me a couple o' thousand, and that would go a long ways toward paying for your operation most likely; and then I could come on and be with you whilst you was convalescing; and then, if anything was to happen to me, the business would be all right and I'd leave you and the childern fixed."

This was the simple, humble statement of his mind in the matter; that solemn devotion to his work that makes a priestcraft and an art of business. Like all successful creators, he consecrated himself to his work and sacrificed himself to its completion. No poet or sculptor could have a holier or purer ambition for perfection and a flawless conclusion, and there was no more thought of selfishness or greed.

Momma understood and loved him, but the disease in her soul took offense at everything; and, though she realized the selflessness of his motive, she took a perverse delight in distorting it.

Then ensued one of those duels in which each took the wrong side with a kind of devoted insincerity. Poppa frantically declared that he would go, and nothing should stop him, and she as frantically declared that if he went she wouldn't.

Momma insisted that she hadn't a friend on earth or in New York, and she would rather go back and die in her own bed than die alone in New York.

This reminded her distraught husband that she did have a friend in New York—her old playmate, Ella Jemison, who had married Sam Killip and gone to New York and fortune.

"Oh yes, I'm likely to ask rich folks like her to take me in!" Momma sobbed. "She wouldn't look at me. She's forgotten she ever knew me, though we are kind of second cousins by marriage."

"Well, her husband hasn't forgot he ever knew me," Poppa snapped. "Didn't I have a letter from him only the other day, and didn't he say his wife asked to be kindly remembered to you?"

"Sam Killip wrote to you!" Momma cried. "How'd rich folks like him come to write to you?"

Poppa winced again at being a prophet without honor in his own home. "Oh, I guess he ain't the only rich folks in the world. He said he saw I was a director in the Third National Bank, and he wanted to enlarge his capital, and he could offer me a chance to git in on the ground floor of a patent locomotive stoker he was pushing. He said he was a little short of cash."

"Sam Killip short of cash!"

"Rich folks are always short of cash," Poppa explained. "That's why they're rich. The minute they git any cash they put it into something and make it work. I was going to tell Sam I couldn't see my way clear, but if Ella will look after you a little I'll help him out."

This put a new face on the matter. Instead of going to New York as a decrepit, friendless villager, imploring the pity of an old acquaintance on whom her only claim was an old acquaintance, she was offered a chance to float in upon her as a bearer of rich gifts. She smiled evenly and thought of the Three Wise Men.

"I'd go there as a kind of a Mrs. Magi, then?"

"Yes! Exactly! And I guess she'd treat you like a grand duchess, or something."

"Oh no, I don't see how I could," Momma sighed, slumping again, too deeply dejected to reach out and pluck the golden apple.

But Poppa had more insight than anyone suspect-

ed, and he had caught the glint of interest in Momma's eye. It was the first sparkle he had seen there for weeks, and, though it had been quenched at once, it emboldened him to tyranny. He got to his feet and left the house with a maddening mysteriousness.

He was inspired to the amazing audacity of calling Mr. Killip on the long-distance telephone. He went to the hotel so that Momma could not interrupt him. When he had his New York victim by the ear he told him the whole story, and Killip, who was still human, though a New Yorker, was as effusive in welcoming Momma as in accepting Poppa's additional offer of money enough to stoke the stoker project to a hearty glow.

Poppa went back and told Momma what he had done, and told her to pack up. Her next obstacle was:

"But I got no clo'es here. I'll have to go home and pack, and I 'ain't just got the stren'th."

"You got no clothes at home, either," Hattie put in. "You can go downtown with me and get you some decent things. You can't go to New York looking like an old farmer."

This was the wrong note. Momma broke her moorings again.

"I told you you was ashamed of me. I'm not fit to be seen in Terra Hut, let alone in New York. I'm simply not going to New York to make an exhabition of myself and make Ellar Killip turn up her nose at me."

This battle had lasted only a few hours longer, when a telegram arrived from Ella herself:

Overjoyed dearest Mattie to learn that you will visit New York though greatly distressed to learn of your indisposition.

You must come to us of course. Just let me know the train and I will meet you whatever the hour. I know Doctor Courtnedge very well and he is an old darling. Love to you and your husband from us both.

ELLA.

The gracious warmth of this brought tears to the eyes of the poor derelict, but she masked her sniffle in a sniff.

"Where'd she learn all those swell words?"

Hattie told her mother, as usual, that she ought to be ashamed of herself, and Momma was.

She prolonged her resistance to the point where Poppa grew desperate enough to groan.

"Well, you do as you're a mind to. Seein' you're strong enough to fight forever, you go home and run the business and I'll go to the hospital my own self."

"Run the business! That's all you think of!" she retorted, with a sublime *non sequitur*. "Put me on the cattle train and ship me off to the slaughterhouse. Ella still loves me, anyway, even if nobody else does, and she'll see to it I get buried decent, and that's all I got a right to expect."

Poppa dashed out and bathed his hot head in cold water before he went to the ticket office. He nearly bit the head off the agent, just to show that he had some manhood left.

He was never quite the same man again after he got Momma on the train at last. He bade her a despondent farewell, feeling sure that he would never see her again. And, in a sense, he never did. . . .

Going to the city for the first time in her life, especially at such a time in her life, was an adventure and a half for Momma.

In spite of the fact that she was advancing toward

the knives of a surgeon who was her forlorn hope, she could not but feel a certain elation. She was experiencing what Victor Hugo called a "new shudder."

She was almost more afraid of Ella Killip and her splendor than of the pancreatic specialist. She was fairly smothered with dread of facing the woman she had not seen since Ella was a gangling, noisy, small-town tomboy, all freckles and giggles and gawkiness.

She foresaw Ella as a sort of vast and glittering Queen Victoria, fattened on rich food and studded with jewels. She saw herself as a shabby farm wife whom Ella would probably give one glance and flee from with disdain.

When she reached New York at last, her first struggle was with a red-capped ruffian who tried to steal her valise. Her next struggle was with her terror of the meeting with Ella. If she had known how to get a train back to Carthage she would have taken it. But the crowd hustled her up the platform and she lugged a soul heavier than her rusty hand bag.

No one had met her at the train, and she was morbid enough to hope that Ella had missed her. But inside the station she found a crowd held back by a rope, and paused to stare at the staring eyes.

She saw no one that suggested the Ella she had planned, but a tall, slim creature, dressed like an actress, in glistening silk, came forward hesitantly. She looked young, and yet she didn't. Her hair was hidden by a hat whose brim seemed to have been flourished by the impatient, whimsical stroke of a painter's brush.

From this dressmaker's model came a voice that startled the valise from Momma's hand, for the voice came out of childhood, and it was the voice of Ella. It sang a new tune, but it was the old voice. It said, timidly, tentatively: "Mattie? Is it you?"

Momma's soft old knees caved in, and she sat on the valise as she whimpered, "This is me, but you're never Ella."

"Oh yes, I am, my dear," said Ella, with a good laugh, as she hoisted Momma to her feet. "I'm the same old sixpence."

"You look more like your own daughter, if you have one."

"Oh, I have one—three, in fact. But—come along, you old dear."

She nodded to a redcap, who took the valise and followed her as she led Momma through the station. Momma's dazed eyes supposed they were taking a short cut through a cathedral.

The Killip limousine was marvelous, but she expected marvels. She was a trifle disappointed when she reached Ella's home. She had expected to drive through a royal park to a palace. But she was put down at a house built jam in among a lot of other houses.

It was not half the size of Momma's house and had no yard at all except a small patch at the back.

In place of a double row of stiff-necked butlers up a grand staircase, there was one very pleasant young man at the door and an awfully nice hired girl in cap and apron. Very friendly she was, too, and helped Momma in the most folksy way up to her room.

Ella came along, and when the maid was sent for tea she petted Momma and stuffed a pillow in her

back and then drew a chair close up, and said: "Now, Mattie dear, tell me all about it. What on earth is the trouble, you poor soul?"

But Momma was so embarrassed by numberless disparities between herself and this strange creature who had started life with even less advantages, that she could not be at ease.

She was dazed by the brilliance of Ella, by her blithe yet haughty carriage, her young skin, slim, deft hands, youthful alertness, her fashionable voice, her fashionable politeness.

She saw that Ella's hair was white, now that her hat was off; but her hair was ironed and fluted and polished and dressed as for a fancy-dress ball.

Momma summed up her bewildered homage, if it was homage, in one helpless query:

"What makes you powder your hair, Ella?"

Ella laughed aloud. A little of the old boisterousness broke through the years of control.

"As my boys would say, 'Whaddaya mean, "powder my hair"?' That's my own poor old gray wool, damn it!"

Ella's swear word even had a fashionable fillip! Momma had never sworn in her life, or, that is, hardly ever; certainly not with a smile. When she had reached profane words she had used stupid old-womanish expletives.

But Ella's casual objurgation broke the ice magically. There is nothing that clears the air of formality like a little damn.

Momma was so numb that it merely startled her from her torpor. She laughed the first laugh that had been shaken out of her dust bin of a soul for six weeks.

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After that the two old women were themselves again; two girls who had parted and gone round the world two opposite ways and come together at last to exchange experiences. Their costumes and their dialects had changed with their travel, but their hearts were as of old.

Momma had to hear first of Ella's amazing experiences. This desire itself was a miracle of change; she had already forgotten herself for a while.

Ella's husband came home before Ella had finished her Arabian Nights' Entertainment, and he was pleasantly surprised and surprising. He had expected Mattie to be more ill than she was, and he had not expected her to look at all like his own wife. He knew only too well how expensive Ella's looks were and how different a life she led from the women of the old home town.

The dinner was simple, but "awful tasty," as Mattie proclaimed. She was astounded to find herself eating with relish. But the service was irresistible. The amiable gentleman who handed the plates around and took them away was so solicitous about suggesting to her the best morsels that she would not insult him by refusing anything or break his heart by leaving an untouched plate for him to carry away.

Sam Killip was eager to know about all the friends and enemies of his youth, and remembered so well the people and the nooks and the scraps of those good old days that the dinner went by like a wedding feast.

Fortunately the Killip children were away at schools and house parties, and Momma was not subjected to the inspection of a generation that found even Ella Killip old fashioned and conservative.

When Ella said she had given up trying to keep up with the youngsters, Momma laughed her to scorn with a quaint phrase, "Oh yes, to hear you tell it!"

After dinner Sam had a meeting of some charitable board, and Ella and Mattie settled down for a confab. Ella neglected to mention that she had sent her opera box to friends of hers, and she made no allusion to the fact that it was the first performance of a new rôle for Caruso, and she would have given an eyetooth to hear him.

She spread Momma out on what she called a *chaise-longue*. Momma said it was the only comfortable sofa she'd ever laid on, and she was going to have one like it if it busted Poppa. Momma was already planning for the future! And thinking of it in terms of comfort!

She was reluctant to discuss her famous illness, but Ella insisted on knowing the worst.

"Well, it simply baffled all the doctors," Momma said, in a tone not altogether boastless. "I don't know how to describe it. It's just a kind of gener'l goneness. I got no heart for anything—no appatite for my vittles, no int'rest in the house or church work or the heathen or the fambly. I don't want to go to bed nights and I don't want to get up mornings. Always been a fiend on house-keepin', but I don't much care now whether things are in their place or not. Dust don't worry me like it used to. I'm all dusty myself. No special aches or pains, but I just don't feel good anywhere.

"Want to cry all the time and I don't know why. Hate to go outdoors and hate to stay in. Poppa drives me nearly crazy with everything he does and says, but I drive myself crazier still. I ain't friends

with myself or anybody. Want to die, and can't bear the thought of that, either. It's just a kind of all-wrongness everywhere, if you can make anything out of that."

To her amazement, Ella said, "I know just how you feel and you've come to the right place to be cured."

It was a little disconcerting to have Ella claim a share in Momma's wonderful disease and to speak so offhandedly of its cure. But instead of rebuking Ella for presuming and for minimizing the crisis, Momma felt relieved, and before long she was yawning nobly and confessing that she could not keep her eyes open. Ella went to her room with her and saw her bestowed, then kissed her good night and left her. Momma noted that her valise had been unpacked, her bed opened, her nightgown and slippers laid out, a water bottle set by the reading lamp on a little table by the bed head, and a dozen little thoughtfulnesses executed in her behalf.

When she was in her old nightgown, which was modeled on the potato-bag pattern, and had said her prayers, she crept into the disgracefully fine linen sheets and slept in luxurious oblivion for nine good hours.

She did not know that Ella had sneaked into her own room, dressed swiftly, and stolen out to the opera, where she stood up, and then went to a supper after, and there danced awhile before she sneaked home to bed.

Momma had her breakfast in bed at Ella's previous order, and wandered about the house for hours after Ella had rung for her breakfast and sent for Momma.

Ella was a sight. She looked like one of those immor'l French kings' favorites. She had on a lace boudoir cap and a silk nightgown, very deckolett, and a "breakfast jacket" (of all things!) of satin and lace.

She did look handsome. Momma had always hated to have even Poppa see her before breakfast. She began to be a little eager for her cure.

"When do I go to see this Doctor Courtneidge?"

Ella hesitated a moment, then spoke with a certain sternness:

"There are two or three things that have to be done first, Mattie dear. I'm always a beast up till noon, so you mustn't be surprised if I'm brutally frank now. Doctor Courtneidge is a very fussy and snappy old gentleman. He has only swells for patients and he's very particular."

"Doesn't he treat poor folks at all?" Momma gasped.

"Oh yes, he has free clinics and hospitals and all that, and does half his work for nothing. That's why he's so particular with his pay patients. You've got to go through a course of sprouts and buy some things, or you'll never get near him.

"His reception room is full of people, and you'd feel terribly embarrassed to wait there till he gets round to you. So you really must have some of this year's clothes and a 1920 hat. And your hair—you mustn't be offended, Mattie dear, but really your hair and your skin! He'd give you one glance and send you away without an examination, even. You see, I know him.

"And then the examination, Mattie dear—well, you know what that's like. And in the hospital—

well! I saw the nightgown laid out on your pillow, and that sort of thing would simply frighten the doctor to death. He really couldn't operate."

"I'm not looking to marry the old fool," Momma mumbled. "I got one husband a'ready."

"I know, my dear Mattie, but your one husband put you in my charge and I'm going to see you through. My masseuse is coming to the house this morning. She's downstairs now, I imagine, and I'm going to have her begin on you. When she's finished, my hairdresser, François, will get to work on that dear old poll of yours and take off about forty years of age. Then we'll have lunch and go shopping."

Momma was choked with wrath, but Ella would neither fight nor plead. She just bullied her with laughter, and Momma, feeling like a convict unjustly imprisoned, set her jaws and resolved to go through with the sentence. She revolted, however, at the insolence of the masseuse and her exclamations of horror at the neglect of a "skin that had never really been cleaned."

But the wretch silenced Momma's indignation with the indignity of smeared cold cream, and smothered her with hot towels and cold towels, and with lotions of every odor and smart.

Momma would not speak to her when she left, but when she scowled at the mirror she gazed aghast at the new face it flung back at her. The dull parchment of her skin had become a living integument with a kind of dreamy radiance alive in it.

Momma felt bewitched. She would have sworn that the image in the looking-glass smiled first at her and nodded, compelling her to smile back and

nod in return. She hung there fascinated, understanding a little of what Narcissus felt when he looked first in the pool.

Then a quiet Frenchman was shown in. He overawed Momma by his dignity and his dexterity. She dared not slap his face when he spoke of her hair as a crime. He called it a "cream," but she understood his shoulders.

And then he attacked her poor head with ferocious familiarity. If Poppa had ever caught him, and her, he'd certainly have shot them both.

Momma was in for it, however, and she actually permitted this strange man, this appalling foreigner, to take down her hair, drench it, soap it, souse her head in water, pour curious smelly things over her scalp, and rinse them out, massage her occiput, comb and pull and torture and iron her hair and dress it on top of her astounded skull in what he called a "French Twist." She spent a whole hour of "feeling like a shirt in a steam laundry," as she afterward expressed it. Then he brandished before her a mirror and uttered a triumphant cry of something that sounded like:

"Ah, my damn, walla, walla!"

Momma blushed vermilion and felt as immoral as she looked. Yet not at all remorseful, somehow. Fortunately, Franswa dashed out to prepare the hair of Ella, leaving Momma to ponder her new face and her new hair with a new soul.

She felt that, in Hattie's formula, she ought to be ashamed of herself, but, to save her immortal being, she could not.

Only one thing she was sure of, and that was that that head and that hair did not belong on top of that

old dress of hers. Her one "best dress" was the one worst dress she had ever seen.

When at length she saw Ella, Ella screamed with delight at the transformation, and said something that rimed:

"Grow old along with me.
The best is yet to be."

The afternoon was spent in shopping for what Ella called "landjerree."

Until she had the proper underpinnings, Ella simply refused to buy Mattie the new dress and hat she was already clamoring for.

The amount of Poppa's money that Ella spent on silken shamelessness dazed Momma, but Ella would not be checked, and Momma was too childishly interested in the new doll rags to make more than a show of resistance.

Ella said, "If your husband has money enough to waste ten thousand dollars on my husband's foolish investments, he has money enough to buy you some decent underclothes."

"Did you say 'decent'?" was Momma's feeble disclaimer, but she barely muttered it.

That night, on a plea of going to bed early, Momma locked herself in her room and tried on the new things. She nearly died of palpitation of the heart when she stood up in silk stockings, satin mules, and in a new streamline corset that gave her a figure! A heroic figure, indeed, but a shape, a contour, that was not altogether an insult to the Creator who fashioned it. Momma had to give it a religious significance to live through it.

And why not? What instinct is more deeply im-

planted in womanhood than the immemorial insatiable lust for pretty things? It has resisted the immemorial insatiable lust of preachers and satirists for insulting it, of economists and hard-working men for denouncing it. It has been called every contemptuous and cruel name in every language. Laws have been made against it innumerably in vain. And it has flourished as unconquerably as violets in moss, as perfume in hyacinths, as bright plumage in birds, and ornate sunsets in western skies.

The weavers of silk and the needlers of laces, the designers of gowns and of hats, have kept up their beautiful careers despite the thunders of self-styled virtue and the writers of all times.

Poets and prosers and painters who have turned less beautiful lines and have married less beautiful colors, and the critics who have celebrated their achievements, have looked down with disdain on those who have devoted their inspirations and their toil to the creation of felicitous decorations for the living body.

But the women have known better. They never have despised the artists who improved them and enhanced them; and by hook or by crook they have kept those artists alive and blessed them with fame.

And again why not? The pietists and the Puritans who cannot forgive women for trying to be beautiful, do they not belie their own gods in their own barbaric praise of ugliness?

"O Justice, what crimes are committed in thy name!" And, O Beauty, what crimes in thine! Yet beauty shall not die nor the love of ornament, and those who hate them cannot prove their right to cast a stone. Frightful extravagances and cruelties are

the result of the hunger for beauty and the feeding of that appetite, but this is true of every other religion and law and ideal.

If everybody who dressed plainly and lived without luxury gave all he saved or she did not spend to the poor, their miserliness might be justified, but everybody knows that this is not so.

Beauty is generous. She who is pleased with herself is already hospitable, and until the millennium is here those who have not the energy or the wile to get fine clothes and wear them well may content themselves as best they can by watching the well-bedecked go by.

And who is he so mean of soul that he would decree the extinction of the custom women have of making themselves as pleasing to the eye as possible? And what benefits would the vandal confer on bedulled mankind?

Momma, at least, at last was not of that humor. She had become a girl again at heart. She could never be again the gracile nymph who had turned the heads of Carthage swains with her flesh of apple-blossom hue, her fleecy hair in its ribbons, and her gay body in its winsome fabrics.

But she could be a splendid white-haired matron; and that age has a nobler beauty and a grander charm than even youth can give, youth so common and so helpless in its grace.

When Momma walked by chance in front of the long cheval glass she fell back with a sob of fear and shame. But she approached again and studied herself. She stood up straight, lifting her head proudly on her throat, her torso on her hips; holding herself stalwart as an empress.

And she thanked God for what He had given her, and promised Him she would take better care of the chalice of her soul. And a happiness possessed her like a benediction.

The next day she went forth to buy dresses, not mere tents to hide her shapeless body under, colored bags to cover her lumps and bulges from the casual and unlingering eye, but exquisite masterpieces from skilled looms, piously accepting the human form and developing its graces.

Ella was not fool enough to put kittenish anachronisms of dress on Momma. She made her look herself at her supreme.

And the slithy mannequins who stood about raved over the miracle that had been accomplished in turning the dowdy peasant that entered the shop into the high-bred dowager that smiled upon the approving mirror.

Momma's only grief was that she could not wear any of the gowns out on the street at once. She had a frantic desire to prance up Fifth Avenue without delay. But there were alterations to make, and she must wait.

And so must Doctor Courtneidge.

She took the delay as her punishment for having put off so long the day of her at-one-ment with her better self.

The afternoon was spent among the milliners. Glistening countesses in black satin came and went, with hats like coronets. They set them daintily on Momma's turreted hair, and lifted them away again. Momma sat up so straight that she felt taller sitting down than she had seemed hitherto reaching for a pantry shelf.

It was unbelievable how much it changed her face to change her hat. She cowered in horror from beneath some of the brims, but others so caught her up into the clouds that they amounted to translation —apotheosis almost.

In spite of Ella's cries of protest, she bought five of the costliest and wore one of them away.

She went to bed prostrated. But it was the prostration of a girl come home from a great ball, worn out with rapture and pursued by remembered music.

Poppa had not heard a word of Momma since the telegram she sent him saying that she had arrived and been met and was awful tired and discouraged.

When no letters came he was sure that she was up to her old trick of concealing the worst from him as long as possible. He was sure that she was in the hospital, delirious with pain, and on her way to the grave. His heart went mad with visions of her loss and of the dismal life without her.

On another of his impulses he took a train for New York, sending a brief telegram to Ella.

He got off the train in much the desolate mood that had dejected Momma when she arrived. He also resisted the redcap and trudged dolefully to the line where people waited behind the rope. And up to him also came a gorgeous creature whom he did not recognize until he heard the ancient voice.

"Poppa, don't you know me?"

The voice was Momma's, but since when was she a Tsarina off the throne? He, too, dropped his handbag and collapsed. And she lifted him, and murmured, as she kissed him:

"Don't you like me?"

"I don't know you," he faltered.

But he kissed her suave and fragrant cheek again and looked into the gleaming eyes of the bride he remembered out of the long ago.

Then he began to laugh in great gulps of blissful anguish, like a boy who has found on the Christmas tree a richer gift than he had ever dreamed of or dared to ask.

Momma cried, too. But such a different wail from the wails he had heard from her of late!

Finally Poppa thought that he must give credit for the redemption to where it was due.

"That Doctor Courtneidge is certainly a wonder. What on earth did he do to you?"

"I haven't seen him yet," said Momma. "And I'm not goin' to. I've taken what Ella calls the 'hat cure' and all the other clothes cures. And they haven't cost much more than old Courtneidge would have charged."

Poppa felt very uneasy walking along with Momma in all her glittering glory. He had always loved her. Now he felt proud of her with the goodly pride of a man who has the luck to get a beautiful wife and the brains to keep her beautiful.

The only fly in the great bowl of ointment was himself, his shabby self. He confessed as much.

"I'm ashamed to be seen with you, Momma."

"You won't be after I get through taking you to the tailor's and the other places I'm goin' to take you to. This is our second honeymoon, Poppa. We didn't have any trousseau at all before, but we're goin' to make up for it now. I think I'll telegraph for Hattie and give her a look, just so's to hear her say, 'Why, Momma, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!'"

"I guess you'd oughta, at that," Poppa guffawed.

And as she swept into Ella's limousine like a Roman empress entering a chariot, Momma tittered:

"I am! I'm so ashamed of myself I'm proud of it!"

II

THE STICK-IN-THE-MUDS

I

A SKIFF went prowling along the demure Avon River in the unhurried English twilight that releases the sunset with reluctance and defers luxuriously the roll call of the stars.

The skiff floated low, for the man alone in it was heavy, and he was in no greater haste than the northern night—which was against the traditions, for he was an American, an American business man.

He was making his way through the sky-hued water stealthily, lest he disturb the leisure of the swans, drowsy above their own images; lest he discourage the nightingale trying a few low flute notes in the cathedral tower of shadow that was a tree above the tomb of Shakespeare.

The American had never heard a nightingale and it was his first pilgrimage to the shrine of the actor-manager whose productions Americans curiously couple with the Bible as sacred lore.

During the day Joel Wixon had seen the sights of Stratford with the others from his country and from England and the Continent. But now he wanted to get close to Shakespeare. So he hired the skiff and declined the services of the old boat lender.

And he was stealing up into the rich gloom the

church spread across the river. He was pushing the stern of the boat foremost so that he could feast his eyes. He was making so little speed that the only sounds were the choked sob of the water where the boat cleft it gently and the tinkle of the drops that fell from the lazy oars with something of the delicate music of the uncertain nightingale.

Being a successful business man, Wixon was a suffocated poet. The imagination and the passion and the orderliness that brought him money were the same energies that would have made him a success in verse. But lines were not his line, and he was inarticulate and incoherent when beauty overwhelmed him, as it did in nearly every form.

He trembled now before the immediate majesty of the scene, and the historic meanings that enriched it as with embroidered arrases. Yet he gave out no more words than an æolian harp shuddering with ecstasy in a wind too gentle to make it audible.

In such moods he hunted solitude, for he was ashamed to be seen, afraid to be observed in the raptures that did not belong in the vocabulary of a business man.

He had talked at noon about the fact that he and Shakespeare's father were in wool, and he had annoyed a few modest Americans by comparing the petty amount of the elder Shakespeare's trade with the vasty total pouring from his own innumerable looms driven with the electricity that the Shakespeares had never dreamed of.

He had redeemed himself for his pretended brag by a meek admission:

"But I'm afraid my boy will never write another 'Hamlet.'"

Yet what could he know of his own son? How little Will Shakespeare's father or his scandalized neighbors could have fancied that the scapegrace good-for-naught who left the town for the town's good would make it immortal, and, coming back to die and lie down forever beside the Avon, would bring a world of pilgrims to a new Mecca, the shrine of the supreme, the unique poet of all human time?

A young boy even now was sauntering the path along the other shore, so lazily tossing pebbles into the stream that the swans hardly protested. It came upon Wixon with a kind of silent lightning that Shakespeare had once been such another boy skipping pebbles across the narrow river and peering up into the trees to find out where the nightingale lurked.

Perhaps three hundred years from now some other shrine would claim away the pilgrims, the home, perhaps, of some American boy now groping through the amber mists of adolescence, or of some man as little revered by his own neighbors and rivals as the man Shakespeare was when he went back to Avon to send back to London his two plays a year to the theaters. Had not the town council in his last years passed a resolution that all plays were unlawful, and increased the fines of actors? Had not Shakespeare's own daughter been excommunicated just before his death, for marrying in Lent?

Being a practical man, which is a man who strives to make his visions palpable, Wixon thought of his own home town and the colony of boys that prospered there in the Middle West.

He knew that no one would seek the town because it was his birthplace, for he was but a buyer of

fleeces, a carder of wools, a spinner of threads, and a weaver of fabrics to keep folks' bodies warm. His weaves wore well, but they wore out.

The weavers of words were the ones whose fabrics lasted beyond the power of time and mocked the moths. Was there any such spinner in Carthage to give the town eternal blazon to ears of flesh and blood? There was one who might have been the man if—

Suddenly he felt himself again in Carthage. There was a river there, too; not a little bolt of chatoyant silk like the Avon, which they would have called a "crick" back there. Before Carthage rolled the incomprehensible floods of old Mississippi himself, Father of Waters, deep and vast and swift. They had lately swung a weir across it to make it work —a concrete wall a mile wide, and more, and its tumbling cascades spun no little mill wheels, but swirled thundering turbines that lighted cities and ran street cars a hundred miles away.

And yet it had no Shakespeare.

And yet again it might have had, if—

The twilight was so deep now that he shipped his oars in the gloom and gave himself back to the past.

He was in another twilight, only it was the counter-twilight between star-quench and sun-blaze.

II

Two small boys, himself one of them, his sworn chum, Luke Mellows, the other, meeting in the silent street just as the daytide seeped in from the east and submerged the stars in twos and threes.

Joel had tied a string to his big toe and hung it from his window. Luke had done the same thing. They were not permitted to explode alarm clocks and ruin the last sweets of sleep in either home. So they had agreed that the first to wake should rise and dress with stealth, slip down the dark stairs of his house, into the starlit street and over to the other's home, and pull the toe cord.

On this morning Luke had been the earlier out, and his triumphant yanks had dragged Joel feet first from sleep, and from the bed, and almost through the window. Joel had howled protests in shrill whispers, down into the gloom, and then, releasing his outraged toe, had limped into his clothes and so to the yard.

The two tiny children, in a huge world disputed still by the night, had felt an awe of the sky and the mysteries going on there. The envied man who ran up the streets of evenings lighting the gas street lamps, was abroad again already with his little ladder and his quick, insectlike motions; only, now he was turning out the lights, just as a similar but invisible being was apparently running around heaven and putting out the stars.

Joel remembered saying, "I wonder if they're turnin' off the stars up there to save gas, too."

Luke did not like the joke. He said, using the word "funny" solemnly: "It's funny to see light putting out light. The stars will be there all day, but we won't be able to see 'em for the sun."

(Wixon thought of this now, and of how Shakespeare's fame had drowned out so many stars. A man had told him that there were hundreds of great writers in Shakespeare's time, some of them, some-

times, as great as he; yet most people never heard of them.)

As the boys paused, the air quivered with a hoarse *moo!* as of a gigantic cow bellowing for her lost calf. It was really a steamboat whistling for the bridge to open the draw and let it through to the South with its raft of logs.

Both of the boys called the boat by name, knowing her voice. "It's the *Bessie Jane Brown.*" They started on a run to the bluff overlooking the river, their short legs making a full mile of the scant furlong.

Often as Joel had come out upon the edge of that height on his innumerable journeys to the river for fishing, swimming, skating, or just staring, it always smote him with the thrill Balboa must have felt coming suddenly upon the Pacific Ocean.

On this morning there was an unwonted grandeur; the whole vault of the sky was curdled with the dawn, a reef of solid black in the west turning to purple and to amber and finally in the east to scarlet, with a few late planets caught in the meshes of the sunlight and tremulous as dew on a spider's web.

And the battle in the sky was repeated in the sea-like river, with all of the added magic of the current and the eddies and the wimpling rushes of the dawn winds.

On the great slopes opposite, in Illinois, were houses and farmsteads throwing off the night, and in the river the *Bessie Jane Brown,* her red light and her green light trailing scarfs of color on the river as she chuffed and clanged her bell and smote the water with her stern wheel. In the little steeple of

the pilot house a priest guided her and her unwieldy acre of logs between the piers of the bridge, whose lanterns were still belatedly aglow on the girders and again in echo in the flood.

Joel filled his little chest with a gulp of morning air, and found no better words for his rhapsody than, "Gee! but ain't it great?"

To his amazement Luke, who had always been more sensitive than he, shook his head and turned away.

"Gosh! what do you want for ten cents?" Joel had demanded, feeling called upon to defend the worthiness of the dawn.

Luke began to cry. He dropped down on his own bare shins, in the weeds, and twisted his face and his fists in a vain struggle to fight off unmanly grief.

Joel squatted at his side and insisted on sharing the secret; and finally Luke forgot the sense of family honor long enough to yield to the yearning for company in his misery.

"I was up here at midnight last night and I don't like this place any more."

"You didn't come all by yourself? Gee!"

"No, momma was here, too."

"What did she bring you out here at a time like that for?"

"She didn't know I was here."

"What she doin' out here, then?"

"She and poppa had a turble quar'l. I couldn't hear what started it, but findly it woke me up and I listened, and momma was cryin' and poppa was swearin'. And at last momma said, 'Oh, I might as well go and throw myself in the river.' And poppa

said, 'Good riddance of bad rubbish!' and momma stopped cryin', and she says 'All right!' in an awful kind of a voice, and I heard the front door open and shut."

"Gee!"

"Well, I jumped into my shirt and pants and slid down the rain pipe and ran along the street, and there, sure enough, was momma, walkin' as fast as she could.

"I was afraid to go near her. I don't know why, but I was. So I just sneaked along after her. The street was black as pitch, 'cep' for the street lamps, and as she passed ever'one I could see she was still cryin' and stumblin' along like she was blind.

"It was so late we didn't meet anybody at tall, and there wasn't a light in a single house except Jonejes', where somebody was sick, I guess. But they didn't pay any attention, and at last she came to the bluff here. And I follered. When she got where she could see the river she stopped, and held her arms out like she was goin' to jump off or fly or somethin'. The moon was up and the river was so bright you could hardly look at it, and momma stood with her arms 'way out, like she was on the Cross, or somethin'.

"I was so scared and so cold I shook like I had a chill. I was afraid she could hear my teeth chatterin', so I dropped down in the weeds and thistles to keep her from seein' me. It was just along about here, too.

"By and by momma kind of broke, like somebody had hit her. Then she begun to cry again and to walk up and down, wringin' her pore hands. Once or twice she started to run down the bluff and I

started to foller; but she stopped like somebody held her back, and I sunk down again.

"Then, after a long time, she shook her head like she couldn't, and turned back. She walked right by me and didn't see me. I heard her whisperin': 'I can't, I can't. My pore childern! My pore little innocent childern.'

"Then she went back down the street, and me after her, wishin' I could help her. But I was afraid she wouldn't want me to know, and I just couldn't go near her."

Luke wept helplessly at the memory of his poltroonery, and Joel tried roughly to comfort him with questions.

"Gee! I don't blame you. I don't guess I could have, either. But, what was it all about, d'you s'pose?"

"I don't know. Momma went to the front door, and it was locked, and she stood a long, long while before she could bring herself to knock. Then she tapped on it softlike. And by and by poppa opened the door and said, 'Oh, you're back, are you?' Then he turned and walked away and she went in like a whipped dawg.

"I could have killed him with a rock, if she hadn't shut the door. But all I could do was to climb back up the rain pipe. I was so tired and discouraged I nearly fell and broke my neck. And I wisht I had have. But there wasn't any more quarr'l, only momma kind of whimpered once or twice, and poppa said: 'Oh, for God's sake shut up, and lea' me sleep. I got to open the store in the mornin', ain't I?' I didn't do much sleepin', and I guess that's why I woke up first."

That was all of the story that Joel could learn. The two boys were shut out by the wall of grown-up life. Luke crouched in bitter moodiness, throwing clods at early grasshoppers and reconquering his lost dignity. At last he said:

"If you ever let on to anybody what I told you—"

"Aw, say!" was Joel's protest. His knighthood as a sworn chum was put in question, and he was cruelly hurt. Luke took assurance from his dismay and said, in a burst of fury:

"Aw, I just said that! I know you won't tell. But just you wait till I can earn a pile of money. I'll take momma away from that old scounderl so fast it 'll make his head swim!" Then he slumped again. "But it takes so dog-on long to grow up, and I don't know how to earn anything."

Then the morning of the world caught into its irresistible vivacity the two boys in the morning of their youth, and before long they had forgotten the irremediable woes of their elders, as their elders also forgot the problems of national woe and cosmic despair.

The boys descended the sidelong path at a jog, brushing the dew and grasshoppers and the birds from the hazel bushes and the paw-paw shrubs, and scaring many a dewy rabbit from cover.

At the bottom of the bluff the railroad track was the only road along the river, and they began the tormenting passage over the uneven ties, with cinders everywhere for their bare feet. They postponed as long as they could the delight of breakfast, and then, sitting on a pile of timbers, made a feast of such hard-boiled eggs, cookies, cheese, and crackers as they had

been able to wheedle from their kitchens the night before.

Their talk that morning was earnest, as boys' talk is apt to be. They debated their futures as boys are apt to do. Being American boys, two things characterized their plans: one, that the sky itself was the only limit to their ambitions; the other, that they must not follow their fathers' businesses.

Joel's father was an editor; Luke's kept a hardware store.

So Joel wanted to go into trade, and Luke wanted to be a writer.

The boys wrangled with the shrill intensity of youth. A stranger passing might have thought them about to come to blows. But they were simply noisy with earnestness. Their argument was as unlike one of the debates in Vergil's eclogues as possible. It was an antistrophe of twang and drawl.

"Gee! you durned fool, watcha wanta gointa business for?" And—

"Durned fool your own self! Watcha wanta be a writer for?"

Then they laughed wildly, struck at each other in mock hostility, and went on with their all-day walk, returning at night too weary for books or even a game of authors or checkers.

Both liked to read, and they had recently emerged from the stratum of *Old Cap Collier*, *Nick Carter*, *The Kid-Glove Miner*, and *The Steam Man*, into *Ivanhoe*, *Scottish Chiefs*, and *Cudjo's Cave*. They had passed out of the Oliver Optic-Harry Castleman-James Otis epochs.

Joel Wixon read for excitement; Luke Mellows for information as to the machinery of authorship.

Young as they were, they went to the theater—to the op'ra house, which never housed opera.

Joel went often and without price, since his father, being an editor, had the glorious prerogative of "comps." Perhaps that was why Luke wanted to be a writer.

Mr. Mellows, as hard as his own ware, did not believe in the theater, and could not be bullied or wept into paying for tickets. But Luke became a program boy and got in free—a precious privilege he kept secret as long as possible and lost as soon as his father noticed his absences from home on play nights. Then he was whipped for wickedness and ordered to give up the theater forever.

Perhaps Luke would never suffer again so fiercely as he suffered from that denial. It meant a free education and a free revel in the frequent performances of Shakespeare, and of repertory companies that gave such triumphs as "East Lynne" and "Camille," not to mention the road companies playing the uproarious "Peck's Bad Boy," "Over the Garden Wall," "Skipped by the Light of the Moon," and the Charles Hoyt screamers.

The theater had been a cloud-veiled Olympus of mystic exultations, of divine terrors, and of ambrosial laughter. But it was a bad influence.

Mr. Mellows' theories of right and wrong were as simple and sharp as his own knives; whatever was delightful and beautiful and laughterful was manifestly wicked, God having plainly devised the pretty things as baits for the devil's fishhooks. If you enjoyed the earth you could fry in hell forever. If you resisted the beautiful on earth you could sing to a harp eternal hosannas.

Joel used to tell Luke about the plays he saw and the exile's heart ached with envy. The boys took long walks up the river or across the bridge into the wonderlands that were overflowed in high-water times. And they talked always of their futures. Boyhood was a torment, a slavery. Heaven was just over the twenty-first birthday.

Joel got his future, all but the girl he planned to take with him up the grand stairway of the palace he foresaw. Luke missed his future, and all of his dreams.

III

Between the boys and their manhood stood, as usual, the fathers, strange monsters, ogres, who seemed to have forgotten at the top of the bean stalk that they had once been boys themselves down below.

After the early and unceasing misunderstandings as to motives and standards of honor and dignity came the civil war over education.

Wouldn't you just know that each boy would get the wrong dad? Joel's father was proud of Luke and not of Joel. He had printed some of Luke's poems in the paper and called him a "precocious" native genius. Joel's father wished that his boy could have had his neighbor's boy's gift. It was the editor's sorrow that Joel had none of the artistic leanings that are called "gifts." He regretfully gave him up as one who would not carry on the torch his father had set out with. He could not force his child to be a genius, but he insisted that Joel should have an education. The editor had found himself handicapped by a lack of the mysterious enrichment

that a tour through college gives the least absorbent mind. He was determined to provide it for his boy, though Joel felt that every moment's delay in leaping into the commercial arena was so much delay in arriving at gladiatorial eminence.

Luke's father had had even less education than Editor Wixon, and was proud of it. He had never gone far in the world, but he was one of those men who are automatically proud of everything they do and derive even from failure or humiliation a savage conceit.

He made Luke work in his store or out of it as a delivery boy, during vacations from such school terms as the law required. He saw the value of enough education to make out bills and write dunning letters. "Books," to him, meant the doleful books that bookkeepers keep. As for any further learning, he reckoned it a waste of time, a kind of wantonness.

He felt that Providence had intentionally selected a cross for him in the son who was wicked and foolish enough to want to read stories and see plays and go to school for years instead of hurrying right into business.

The thought of sending his boy through a preparatory academy and college and wasting his youth on nonsense was intolerable. It maddened him to have the boy plead for such folly. He tried in vain to whip it out of Luke.

Joel's ideas of education were exactly those of Mr. Mellows, but he did not like Mr. Mellows because of the anguish he inflicted on Luke. Joel used to beg Luke to run away from home. But that was impracticable for two reasons: Luke was not of the

runaway sort, but meek and shy, and obedient to a vice.

Besides, while a boy can run away from school he cannot easily run away to school. If he did he would be sent back, and if he was not sent back how was he to pay for his tooition and his board and books and clo'es?

It was Luke's influence that sent Joel away to boardin' school. Luke so longed to go that Joel felt it foolish to deny himself the godlike opportunity. So Luke went to school vicariously in Joel, as he got his other experiences vicariously in books.

At school Joel was pleasantly surprised. He found so much to do outside of his classes that he grew content to go all the way. There was a glee club to manage, also an athletic club; a paper to solicit ads and subscriptions for; class officers to be elected, with all the delights of political maneuvering—a world in little to run with all the solemnity and competition of the adult cosmos. So Joel was happy and lucky and successful in spite of himself.

The day after he took train up the river to his academy Luke took a position his father secured for him. He entered the little back room where the Butterly Bottling Works kept its bookkeepers on high stools.

The Butterly soda pops, ginger ales, and other soft drinks were triumphs of insipidity, and their birch beer sickened the thirstiest child. But the making and the marketing, and even the drinking of them, were matters of high emprise compared to the keeping of the accounts.

One of the saddest, sweetest, greatest stories ever written is Ellis Pigsispigs Butler's fable of the con-

tented little donkey that went round and round in the mill and thought he was traveling far. But that donkey was blind, and had no dreams denied.

Luke Mellows was a boy, a boy that still "felt his life in every limb," a boy devoured with fantastic ambitions. He had a genius within that smothered and struggled till it all but perished unexpressed. It lived only enough to be an anguish. It hurt him like a hidden, unmentioned, ingrowing toenail that cuts and bleeds and excruciates the fleet member it is meant to protect.

IV

When Joel came home for his first vacation with the rush of a young colt that has had a good time in the corral, but rejoices in the old pastures, his first cry was for Luke. When he learned where he was he hurried to the Bottling Works. He was turned away with the curt remark that employees could not be seen in business hours.

In those days there were no machines to simplify and verify the bookkeeper's treadmill task, and business hours were never over.

Joel left word at Luke's home for Luke to call for him the minute he was free. He did not come that evening, nor the next. Joel was hurt more than he dared admit.

It was Sunday afternoon before Luke came round; a different Luke, a lean, wan, worn-out shred of a youth. His welcome was sickly.

"Geeminetly!" Joel roared. "I thought you was mad at me about something. You never came near."

"I wanted to come," Luke croaked, "but nights

I'm too tired to walk anywheres, and besides I usually have to go back to the offus."

"Gee! that's damn tough!" said Joel, who had grown from darn to damn.

Thinking to light Luke up with a congenial theme, Joel heroically forbore to describe the marvels of academy life, and asked:

"What you been readin' lately—a little bit of everything, I guess, hey?"

"A whole lot of nothin'," Luke sighed. "I got no strength for readin' by the time I shut my ledgers. I got to save my eyes, you know. The light's bad in that back room."

"What you been writin', then?"

"Miles of figures, and entries about 'one gross bottles lemon'; 'two gross sassaprilla'; 'one gross empties returned.'"

"No more poetry?"

"No more nothin'."

Joel was obstinately cheerful.

"Well, you been makin' money, anyways, that's something."

"Yeh. I buy my own shoes and clo'es now and pay my board and lodgin' at home. And paw puts the two dollars that's left into the savings bank. I got nearly thirty dollars there now. I'll soon have enough for a winter soot and overcoat."

"Gee! Can't you go buggy ridin' even with Kit?"

"I could if I had the time and the price, and if her maw wasn't so poorly that Kitty can't get away. I go over there Sunday afternoons sometimes, but her maw always hollers for her to come in. She's afraid to be alone. Kit's had to give up the high school, account of her maw."

"How about her goin' away to be a great singer?"

Luke grinned at the insanity of such childish plans.

"Oh, that's all off! Kit can't even practice any more. The noise makes her mother nervous. And Kit had to give up the church choir, too. She's eatin' her heart out, and you'd hardly know her. She cries a lot about lookin' so scrawny. O'course, I tell her she's pirtier than ever, but that only makes her mad. She can't go to sociables, or dances, or picnics, and if she could she's got no clo'es. We don't have much fun together—just sit and mope, and then I say, 'Well, I guess I better mosey on home'; she says, 'All right. See you again next Sunday, I s'pose. G'by!'"

The nightingale annoyed the owl, and was hushed, and the poet rimed sums in a day book.

The world waited for them and needed them without knowing it; it would have rewarded them with thrilled attention and wealth and fame. But silence was their portion, silence and the dark and an ache that had no voice.

Joel listened to Luke's elegy, and groaned:

"Gee!"

But he had an optimism like a powerful spring, and it struck back now with a whir.

"I'll tell you what, Luke. Just you wait till I'm rich, then I'll give you a job as vice president and you can marry Kitty and live on Broadway in Noo York."

"I've got over believin' in Sandy Claus!" said Luke.

Joel saw little of him during this vacation and less during the next. Being by nature a hater of despair,

he avoided Luke. He had fits of remorse for this, and once he dared to make a personal appeal to old Mr. Mellows to send Luke away to school. He was received with scant courtesy, and only tolerated because he gave the father a chance to void some of his bile at the worthlessness of Luke.

"The cub's no good; that's what's the matter of him. And willful, too—he just mopes around because he wants to show me I'm wrong. But he's only cuttin' off his own nose to spite his face. I'll learn him who's got the most will power."

Joel was bold enough to suggest: "Maybe Luke would be differ'nt if you'd let him go to college. You know, Mr. Mellows, if you'll 'scuse my saying it, there's some natures that are differ'nt from others. You hitch a race horse up to a plow and you spoil a good horse and your field, both. Seems to me as if, if Luke got a chance to be a writer or a perfessor or something, he might turn out to be a wonder. You can't teach a canary bird to be a hen, you know, and—"

Mr. Mellows locked himself in that ridiculous citadel of ancient folly.

"When you're as old as I am, Joel, you'll know more. The first thing anybody's got to learn in this world is to respect their parents."

Joel wanted to say, "I should think that depended on the parents."

But of course he kept silent, as the young usually do when they hear the old maundering, and he gave up as he heard the stupid dolt returning to his old refrain:

"I left school when I was twelve years old. Ain't had a day sence, and I can't say as I've been exactly

a failure; got the best hardware store in Carthage, and holdin' my own in spite of bad business."

Joel slunk away, unconvinced but baffled. One summer he brought all his pressure to bear on Luke to persuade him to throw up his job and strike out for the big city, where the big opportunities grew. He offered to lend him the money from his own savings. But Luke shook his head. He lacked initiative. Perhaps that was where his talent was not genius. It blistered him, but it made no steam.

Shakespeare had known enough to leave Stratford. He had had to hold horses outside a theater at first, but even then he had organized a little business group of horse holders called "Shakespeare's boys." He had the business sense, and he forced his way into the theater and became a stockholder. But Shakespeare was always an adventurer. As a boy he had to work in a butcher's shop, but before he was nineteen he was already married to a woman of twenty-six, and none too soon for the first child's sake. Shakespeare, as Joel said, had a pile of get-up-and-get.

Luke Mellows had not the courage or the recklessness to marry Kitty, though he had as good a job as Shakespeare's. Shakespeare would not let a premature family keep him from his ambition. He was twenty-one when he went to London, but he went, leaving a wife, a daughter, and a pair of twins.

London was a boom town then, about the size of Trenton or Grand Rapids or Spokane, and growing fast. Boys were running away from the farms and villages as they always have done.

Other boys went to London from Stratford, John Sadler to become a big wholesale grocer, and Richard

Field, a publisher. They had as various reasons then as now.

But the main thing was that they left home. That might mean a noble or a selfish ambition, but it took action.

Luke Mellows would not go. He dreaded to abandon his mother to the father who bullied them both. He could not bear to leave Kitty alone with the wretched mother who ruled her with tears.

Other boys left Carthage as Avon, some of them to become failures, and some half successes, and some of them to acquire riches and power. And other boys stayed at home.

Girls, too, had won obscurity by inertia or had swung into fame. Some of the Carthage girls had stayed at home and gone wrong there. Some had gone away in disgrace, and redeemed or damned themselves in larger parishes. There were Aspasias and Joans of Arc in miniature, minor Florence Nightingales and Melbas and Rosa Bonheurs.

But they all had to leap from the nest and try their wings. Of those that did not take the plunge, none made the flight.

Cowardice held some back, but the purest self-sacrifice others. Joel felt that there ought to be a heaven for these latter, yet he hoped that there was no hell for the former. For who can save himself from his own timidity, and who can protect himself from his own courage?

Given a little spur of initiative, a little armor of selfish indifference to the clinging hands at home, and how many a soul might not have reached the stars? Look at the women who were crowding the rolls of fame of late just because all woman-

kind had broken free of the apron strings of alleged respectability.

V

Joel had no proof that Luke Mellows would have amounted to much. Perhaps if he had ventured over the nest's edge he would have perished on the ground, trampled into the dust by the fameward mob or devoured by the critics that pounce upon every fledgling and suck the heart out of all that cannot fling them off.

But Joel could not surrender his childhood faith that Luke Mellows had been meant for another Shakespeare. Yet Mellows had never written a play, or an act of a play. But for that matter, neither had Shakespeare before he went to London. Will was only a poet at first, and some of his poems were pretty poor stuff—if you took Shakespeare's name off it. And his first poems had to be published by his fellow townsman, Field.

There were the childish poems by Luke Mellows that Joel's father had published in the Carthage *Clarion*. Joel had forgotten them utterly and they were probably meritorious of oblivion. But there was one poem Luke had written that Joel memorized.

It appeared in the *Clarion* years after Joel was a success in wool. His father still sent him the paper, and in one number Joel was rejoiced to read these lines:

THE ANONYMOUS
BY
LUKE MELLOWS (OF CARTHAGE)

Sometimes at night, within a wooded park,
Like an ocean cavern fathoms deep in gloom,
Sweet scents like hymns from hidden flowers fume,
And make the wanderer happy, though the dark
Obscures their tint, their name, their shapely bloom.

So, in the thick-set chronicles of fame,
There hover deathless feats of souls unknown.
They linger like the fragrant smoke-wreaths blown
From liberal sacrifice. Gone face and name;
The deeds, like homeless ghosts, live on alone.

Wixon, seated in the boat on Avon, and lost in such dusk that he could hardly see his hand upon the idle oar, recited the verses softly to himself, intoning them in the deep voice one saves for poetry. They sounded wonderful to him in the luxury of hearing his own voice upon the water and indulging his own memory. The somber mood was perfect in accord with the realm of shadow and silence where everything beautiful and living was cloaked in the general blur, the smother of sleep.

After he had heard his voice chanting the last long oh's of the final verse, he was ashamed of his solemnity, and terrified lest some one might have heard him and accounted him insane. He laughed at himself for a sentimental fool. He laughed, too, as he remembered what a letter of praise he had dictated to his astonished stenographer and fired off at Luke Mellows; and at the flippant letter he had had in return.

Lay readers who send incandescent epistles to poets are apt to receive answers in sardonic prose. The poet lies a little, perhaps, in a very sane suspicion of his own transcendencies.

Luke Mellows had written:

Dear Old Joel,—I sure am much obliged for your mighty handsome letter. Coming to one of the least successful wool gatherers in the world from one of the most successful wool distributors, it deserves to be highly prized. And is. I will have it framed and handed down to my heirs, of which there are more than there will ever be looms.

You ask me to tell you all about myself. It won't take long. When the Butterly Bottlery went bust, I had no job at all for six months, so I got married to spite my father, and to please Kit, whose poor mother ceased to suffer about the same time.

The poor girl was so used to taking care of a poor old woman who couldn't be left alone, that I became her patient—just to keep her talents from going to waste.

The steady flow of children seems to upset the law of supply and demand, for there is certainly no demand for more of my progeny and there is no supply for them. But somehow they thrive.

I am now running my father's store, as the old gentleman had a stroke, and then another. The business is going to pot as rapidly as you would expect, but I haven't been able to kill it off quite yet.

Thanks for advising me to go on writing immortal poetry. If I were immortal I might, but that fool thing was the result of about ten years' hard labor. I tried to make a sonnet of it, but I gave up at the end of the decade and called it whatever it is.

Your father's paper published it free of charge and so my income from my poetry has been one-tenth of nothing per annum. Please don't urge me to do any more. I really can't afford it.

The verses were suggested to me by an ancient fit of blues, over the fact that Kit's once-so-beautiful voice would never be heard in song, and by the fact that her infinite goodnesses will never meet any recompense or even acknowledgment.

I was bitter about it and everything the first five years, but during the last five years I have been feeling how rich this dark old world is in good, brave, sweet, lovable, heartbreakingly beautiful deeds that simply cast a little fragrance on the dark and are gone. They perfume the night, and perhaps nobody goes by at all to know it. The busy daylight dispels them like the morning mists that we used to watch steaming and vanishing above the old river. The Mississippi is still here, still rolling along its eternal multitudes of snows and flowers and fruits and fish and snakes and dead men and boats and trees.

They go where they came from, I guess—in and out of nothing and back again. But the world is a pretty sight as it passes by, if you don't fret too much.

Anyway, it is a matter of glory to all of us that you are doing

so nobly. Keep it up and give us something to brag about in our obscurity. Don't worry. We are happy enough in the dark. We have our batlike sports and our owllike prides, and the full sun would only blind us and lose us our way.

Kit sends you her love—and blushes as she says it. That is a very daring word for such shy moles as we are, but I will echo it.

Yours for old sake's sake,

LUKE.

VI

Vaguely remembering this letter now, Joel inhaled a bit of the merciful chloroform that deadens the pain of thwarted ambition.

The world was full of men and women like Luke and Kit. Some had given up great hopes because they were too good to tread others down in their quest. Some had quenched great talents because they were too fearsome or too weak or too lazy to feed their lamps with oil and keep them trimmed and alight. Some had stumbled through life darkly, with no gifts of talent, without even appreciation of the talents of others or of the flowerlike beauties that star the meadows.

Those were the people he had known. And then there were the people he had not known, the innumerable caravan that had passed across the earth while he lived, the inconceivable hosts that had gone before, tribe after tribe, generation upon generation, nation at the heels of nation, cycle on era on age, diuturnity and the backward perpetuity from everlasting unto everlasting. People, people, peoples—poor souls until the thronged stars that make a dust of the Milky Way were a lesser mob.

Here, in this graveyard at Stratford, lay men who

might have overtopped Shakespeare's glory if they had but "had a mind to."

Some of them had been held in higher esteem in their town and had sneered at him. Some had loved and revered him. But they were alike forgotten, their names leveled with the surface of their fallen tombstones.

Had he not cried out in his own "Hamlet," "O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have had dreams—which dreams, indeed, are ambition; for the very substance of the ambitious is merely the shadow of a dream—and I hold ambition of so airy and light a quality that it is but a shadow's shadow."

After all, the greatest of men were granted but a lesser oblivion than the least. And in that overpowering thought there was a strange comfort, the comfort of misery finding itself in an infinite company.

VII

The night was thick upon Avon. The swans had gone somewhere. The lights in the houses had a sleepy look. It was time to go to bed.

Joel yawned with the luxury of having wearied his heart with emotion. He had thought himself out for once. It was good to be tired. He put his oars into the stream and, dipping up reflected stars, sent them swirling in a doomsday chaos after him with the defiant revenge of a proud soul who scorns the universe that grinds him to dust.

He was scorned in turn by the old boatman, who was surly with waiting and did not thank the foreigner for his liberal largess; did not answer his good night.

As Wixon left the river and took the road for his hotel, the nightingale (that forever anonymous nightingale, only one among the millions of forgotten or throttled songsters) revolted for a moment or two against the stifling doom and shattered it with a wordless sonnet of fierce and beautiful protest—"The tawny-throated! What triumph! hark!—what pain!"

It was as if Luke Mellows had suddenly found expression in something better than words, something that any ear could understand, an ache that rang.

Wixon stopped, transfixed as by flaming arrows. He could not understand what the bird meant or what he himself meant; nor could the bird. Still, as there is no laughter that eases the heart like unpacking it of its woes in something beyond wording, so there is nothing that brightens the eyes like tears gushing without shame or restraint.

Joel Wixon felt that it was a good, sad, mad world, and that he had been very close to Shakespeare—so close that he heard things nobody had ever found the phrases for—things that cannot be said, but only felt; things transmitted, rather by experience than by expression, from one poor worm in the mud to another.

III

READ IT AGAIN

THE tall Sunday-school teacher stood and harangued a small flock of fidgety boys. They thought of nearly everything except what he was saying, and if they learned anything at all it was something that he never dreamed he taught. One of the Sabbath sparrows was fascinated by the play of light on the teacher's features. It streamed through a window of imitation stained glass cut in small, diamond-shaped panes, covered with colored paper oiled into translucence.

What fascinated the boy was the miracle wrought in the teacher's appearance by the change of light as his weight shifted from foot to foot and his head from beam to beam. When his brow was smitten by the shaft from a blue pane, he looked wan, ethereal, spiritual, holy. Then he moved into a rosy glow, as if into a fountain of youth, and the pallid ascetic was suddenly young, ruddy, amused, exuberant. With the change of appearance his character seemed to change; he was not the same man in any respect. His interpretation of the Scriptures seemed to be altered.

He bent forward into a greenish glare, and at once was three days dead, livid, loathsome, grisly. He leaned back into the influence of a pane whose colored paper had curled up and peeled off. Through

this came a ray of ordinary daylight. And ordinary daylight is not considered mysterious, since it contains all the mysteries of light and emphasizes none. Herein the teacher looked to be merely himself, and of course there is nothing mysterious about an ordinary man.

Again and again this Proteus slipped from phase to phase, recurring to each aspect as he passed through a sheaf of tints like a clutch of brushes, each painting a new portrait.

The boy remembered this kaleidoscope of character for many a year, but he was no longer a boy, and deeply steeped in life before he seemed to find an important lesson in the unimportant incident—a primer lesson in the art of understanding other people and in the science of analyzing other people's motives as well as one's own.

For of all the dreadful habits of mankind, few are so nearly universal and eternal as that of ascribing to another person a motive he did not feel, and then condemning him and exalting ourselves on that cheap and flimsy basis.

We are most contemptible when we are contemptuous, for we judge everything by appearances that are never complete or correct, forgetting that we see and are seen not by any light of our own, but by some other body's light, that strikes from outside and ricochets into the observer's eyes. And the observer accepts us or rejects, according to our alien illumination. And even this borrowed color is misleading, for the colored glass itself gets its character and its name not from the rays that it absorbs, but from those it lets go. A red rose is one that rejects the color red.

What is true of our appearance is true of our deeds as well. They are, and must be, judged not by themselves, but by the look they wear in a foreign glow that dyes them with its own pigments. If you disbelieve it, read this scene, and try to judge of the merit or demerit of the characters.

I

A child shrieks in wild fear: "Papa! Papa!"

A tall man laughs as he tosses the boy in air. Its little body falls safely into his big hands. Now the boy gurgles with laughter. The tiny fingers that clutched space clasp the neck of the man so tenderly that he groans with love. He crushes the pink frame to his heart till he wrings a cry of pain.

A moment of contentment, and then the child demands to be thrown aloft again into terror.

As the father is about to obey, a slim, soft hand is laid on his arm, and a woman warns him:

"If some one hears the baby call you 'papa'!"

The woman is ages old to the child, but hardly more than a girl to the man, who is himself still a boy at heart. He accepts her command and puts the child down, but it storms:

"No, no, mamma! Papa! Papa!"

Now both of them try to hush its clamor and both look about anxiously. At all costs the child must be entertained. The man drops to his knees, and says:

"Baby must not call me 'papa.'"

The child insists: "You are my papa! You telled me so!"

"Yes, sweet; but you must not tell other people

so. You must not tell anybody you saw me here."

"Why?"

Those whys take a bit of explaining. It is easier to divert the mind than to satisfy it. The man falls forward on his hands.

"Come for a ride!"

The mother lifts the boy and puts him in the saddle, holds him there while the father hobbles about on palms and knees, with many an awkward pretense at curvet and caracole, at balking and backing and running away.

The child shouts now, "Gid-dap, horsie!" now, "Whoa, horsie!"

The mother laughs. She is not afraid so long as the child calls its father a horse. At last the steed collapses and spills the rider on the floor. The mother bends down in the posture of the crouching Venus. The father sits on the carpet. The child's head is on a level with his father's. This pleases him. He boasts:

"Looky! I am taller than my papa!"

"Yes, so you are, my big man."

"Why you don't come more times to see us?"

"I—I'd like to. I will. I must go now."

"No! No!" Frantic resistance and fierce protest. It is not easy for the father to rip the little hands loose.

"You will take good care of your mamma till I come again?"

This responsibility inspires bravery.

"Yes."

"And you won't tell anybody you saw me? Promise?"

"If you tell me why, I promise."

The father gives up in despair. The mother smiles wretchedly.

"How like you! Wonderful that he should look like you and think and speak so much like you! He's a tiny pocket edition of you."

"No; he has your eyes—your beautiful mouth."

"He is both of us, and neither."

They rise to their full height and embrace, with a bitter rivalry in devotion.

The child, finding them suddenly lifted into the clouds, their faces hidden from him by their clasped arms, hovers about, beating at his knees, twitching at her skirt.

Jealous of their mutual love, greedy of their common love, he pushes between them. They bend and gather him into their embrace in a kind of trinity. The father reiterates his, "I must go."

The mother forgets the child, groans, clutches him.

"No! No!" A clock strikes. "Yes; you must."

A footstep is heard. The woman blenches. The man is startled. He turns and steals toward another door.

The baby cries: "Papa!"

The mother tries to restrain him. He breaks away, darts forward, crying: "Papa! Papa!"

When he arrives, flying, his father seizes him, smothers his mouth under a firm hand, pleading:

"Hush! For God's sake, hush!"

And now that you have spied on this little domestic scene through the plain, unstained glass, what do you make of the people, their characters, their motives, their worth?

Does not your guess rather show your own character than theirs? What sort of glass are you—red, blue, yellow, or green? Would it make a difference to you if you were told that the father is a Belgian officer who marched with the beaten army out of Flanders, who learned that his home has been taken as a billet for German officers, and has risked his life to be with his little family for a few perilous moments, knowing that his presence will be suspected if his child is heard calling him "papa"?

Read it again, and see if it makes a change in the quality of your sympathy.

Then keep the same people, words, acts, emotions, before you, but put them under another glass. Imagine that the father is not a soldier who has braved the enemy, but a draft evader. His nation is in peril. Other fathers have gone out to defend their homes, but he has been craven. His young wife is so rich that he could not claim exemption on her account. He had preferred to run away and hide, and has now crept back to borrow funds of his wife and go back into seclusion. The poor, infatuated wife loves him in spite of his cowardice. The child does not know.

Read it again in the light of the belief that the scene is one of illicit love—the man the woman's paramour. Her absent husband trusts her and his friend, and believes the child his own. The false friend and the false wife keep up their perfidy. The child has overheard the truth and, all guileless, revels in the hideous relationship. The footstep that frightens the two is the step of the home-coming husband.

As a matter of fact, these three are the victims

of the chaotic American divorce laws. In earlier years the man had long ago married another woman, who had deserted him for a rich lover, whom she had married after a Western divorce farce. Believing himself free, this man fell in love with this good girl and she with him. They had been married only a few weeks when the courts declared the Western divorce void and invalid. The man was technically guilty of bigamy. To save him and her own name, the girl moved to a strange town. When the child was born she moved to another town, pretending that she was a widow, and worked hard to support her baby and herself.

The hapless father has found her, but he cannot free himself or her or the child from the snare of the law. He can only leave her the pitiful protection of the widow's disguise and his child the shield of the name she has assumed.

Does his cowardice seem to disgrace him now?

II

Flattened, and wriggling as a snake lurking among rocks, a man with blood-matted hair crawls through matted roots and vines. He lifts his head slowly till his eye can just peer above the edge of a stone. A bullet zings, searing his scalp and starting another trickle of blood.

He lowers his head, cursing, gathers his rifle in his arms, and rolls over and over to the shelter of another bowlder. He looks round it cautiously, smiles hideously, thrusts his rifle forward through the weeds, and, taking aim with an agony of care, fires.

He laughs as he sees the bullet strike one of his

enemies, hears a "thwuck," a grunt, a thrashing about. Then silence tells him his foes are fewer by one. But many others are creeping toward him. He is mad with thirst. His own blood is salty and quenches none of his fever. But he will not surrender. In fact, he dare not if he would. If he should hold up his hand it would be shot off before he could pull it back. He has killed too many of his enemies to be granted any parley. He has indeed decoyed some of them from cover, merely to plant his cartridges in their bodies. They will be satisfied only with his life. He is auctioning it off for the highest price it will bring.

He has picked his stronghold with care. Among shrubs, bowlders, and weeds he finds a varied concealment. His enemies do not even know how many he is. His three companions are dead, but he fires with their rifles and with the cartridges he takes from their gruesome treasure. He wishes to God he only had water and a little bread—and unlimited ammunition! But he has none of these. His eyes are swollen with dust and the strain of sighting. The twilight is blurring everything. The night will bring him dubious help. His enemies will rush him. He may yet escape. But if he is doomed he will add two or three more to the company that will storm heaven for judgment this night.

What is your judgment of him? Do you want him to kill or be killed?

Imagine him one of a band of murderous outlaws who have at last been rounded up by the sheriff and the deputies chosen from the desperate citizens.

Imagine him an American sharpshooter holding

a crucial point too far advanced in the Argonne Forest. The Germans are counter-attacking in force.

Imagine him a German sharpshooter holding up the American advance.

Consider that he and his band are Mexican desperadoes—pursued by cowboys, or vice versa—or a squad of American railway surveyors penned in by hostile Sioux—or a pack of scalp-laden Apaches overtaken by a troop of cavalry, and see how your opinion veers, how quickly the heroism and villainy change places. Though, in each case, the people all feel equal eagerness and anguish and justification and are equally sincere.

As a matter of fact, this episode is taken from one of the sheep and cattle wars of our West. The herders of innocent, silly sheep have been hated by the drovers of long-horned cattle. The cowmen complained that the sheep, nibbling eternally, ruined vast pasturage, since the fastidious cattle will not graze where the vile sheep have been. The cattlemen have just driven a flock of a thousand over a cliff in a bawling cascade. The shepherds have driven hundreds of cattle over another precipice.

Now the shepherds and the cowboys are at war, and I forget which it was that had outnumbered and cornered and killed all but one of these four men. I am not sure whether this last fighter was a cowboy or a shepherd. Does it make much difference to you?

III

Music is floating through lighted windows, beating out across a shadow-striped veranda into the murmurous realm of a moonlit surf.

A man paces the beach in the harmonious air, suffering the yearning in the music and in the rush of the waves that always fall back unappeased.

In the brilliant room whence the music wells and where the dancers spin, a woman sits and taps her little foot impatiently out of time to the orchestra. She is lonely, though she has been besought in dance by a procession of swains. Her heart flies out with the music to the youth on the sand.

She has a certain grandeur of manner and of garb; her skin, indeed, is a garb of luxury, a fabric of ease wrought in silken experiences, with no hard usage to tear or stain it.

The youth on the sand is in uniform. He is rugged, inured to hardships, open air, and danger. He has the look of one who is not afraid to risk his life, who would risk it, indeed, with a kind of gayety, who would rush to meet danger with welcome.

The beautiful woman, with a sudden resolution, pretends to be faint, and, bidding those she passes good night, makes her way from the ballroom on to the veranda, and thence stealthily to the steps and out along the beach to where the young man waits.

And now he loses his native courage. He greets her shyly. She takes the arm he does not offer and marches along the iridescent sand with him. It is he, not she, that looks back anxiously to see if they are watched or followed.

They move together silently to the dim limits of the music's reach, and there she drops to the sand and bids him sit beside her. Wayfarers drift past them on the high board walk, but the haze of moonlight veils them from recognition. They are just two vague people whom nobody knows for who they are.

She says:

"Well, I came. I am here. I felt that you might be waiting, and I couldn't resist. I suppose people would think me insane if they knew."

"Yes."

"And yet perhaps I am wiser than I've ever been before. It all depends on you, after all."

"On me?"

"Of course. On how you feel toward me. You haven't really ever told me."

"I don't know. I don't dare to be sure."

"Why?"

"Because you are so wonderful and I'm only—well, I'm nothing at all."

"But if you loved me?"

"Oh, everybody loves you; you're so beautiful, so wonderful, so rich, and all! But you couldn't love me."

"What if I could?"

"Then you oughtn't to."

"Why not? I'm free. You're free."

"But there's such a tremendous difference in—"

"Love is blind."

"But people are not. Everybody would hiss at you. It wouldn't matter about me. But it would be frightful for you."

"You darling boy! I don't care whether they hiss or not, so long as I'm happy with you."

"But you couldn't be happy with me, for I'm nothing—I'm nobody. They'd abhor you if they saw you with me in this uniform."

"You are beautiful in that uniform."

"But think what it is in the eyes of your people. Your father would want to kill you. I think he'd try to kill me."

"Are you afraid of him?"

"Not on my own account, but on yours. He would hate you, even if he killed me. I don't want to cause you any suffering. That's the only thing I'm afraid of."

"But I'd suffer a thousand deaths if I lost you. I can't bear the thought of it."

"You'll get over it. You mustn't love me. I won't let you. I've no right to your love. I'd go away if I could, but you know I can't. So you must go."

"Never! I'm not afraid of anything but losing you. I'd defy the world for you. Now that I know you love me—for you do love me, don't you?"

"I love you too well to destroy your happiness. I want to protect you."

"Marriage is protection enough, isn't it?"

"How could we marry—you what you are, with me what I am? You'd never forgive yourself or me."

She sighs, rises.

"Well, I can't say any more. You've broken my heart. I hate you—I think. Anyway, I won't bother you any more."

On his knees, he clutches at her hand, kisses it. She draws it free, shakes her head in bewildered despair, and hurries away, her scarf flying about her. She seems but a wraith, a scud of spume blown along the shore.

She goes back to the veranda, turns to stare. She sees a blur on the sand. She does not know whether she despises or adores him the more, the love-poltroon.

The music begins like a tide that softly turns from

ebb to flow. The feet of the dancers swish in gliding ripples. She joins the crowd. A number of men hasten toward her. She lifts her arm and, accepting the embrace of the first to reach her, swings into the eddy, spinning with the swirl like a lost soul in Hades.

What do you make of her and of the young man in uniform?

Suppose that she is a princess and he a member of the King's Own regiment.

Read it again, having in mind the thought that she is the pampered daughter of a wealthy patriot. She is betrothed to an officer desperately wounded in foreign service. She has bewitched a young corporal in a camp near the summer resort.

Lay the scene in Holland. She is an American woman and he an interned German soldier.

Or say that she is a German woman and he an interned English aviator fallen within the neutral lines.

As a matter of fact, she is a rich young woman who has become infatuated with her father's chauffeur.

One more experiment with the colored glasses.

IV

A woman keeps rendezvous in a little house on a cliff. She hears some one open the door, enter the hall. She runs to meet the man. One glance at him changes her look of welcome to a stare of dread.

He curses her frightened smile. His fury is so great that his slavered lips draw back like a wolf's from eager fangs.

The woman retreats as he advances. Under the blast of his denunciation, she flattens herself against the wall, shivering, her palms now pressing the plaster at her sides as if to find a door behind her, now clasped before her in appeal to the demoniac man who reviles her. She cannot scream, and there is no one to hear her. She reads murder in the man's eyes as he snarls:

"Oh, you—you— There's no word for you— I've got to kill you—and by—"

She makes a desperate rush. He strikes her in the breast, and she flops back against the wall and slips to the floor.

He turns for a weapon to crush her with. She springs to her feet and darts past him to the door. He whirls, slips. Before he can reach her she has closed the door.

He rips it open, looks about the dark hall, sees her stumbling fleetly up the stairs. He follows in long strides. She flings another door shut in his face. He hears the key turn.

He hurls himself at the door, batters it with knee and shoulder. It cracks, splinters. He tears out a ragged strip of it, thrusts his arm in, turns the key, strikes the door back, and steps in.

She is at the window sill. She calls to him:

"If you come near, I'll throw myself out on the rocks!"

He halts a moment, then, seeing how dangerously she is poised at the brink of death, leaps toward her, his hand outstretched.

With a little whimper of despair, she writhes through and drops from sight.

He runs to the window, leans out, and sees her

once graceful, beautiful body, a broken, awkward, ludicrous bundle of rags and flesh rolling and bounding down a shelving cliff toward the uplifting arms of the sea.

From the man's throat a cry of anguish breaks forth horribly. He drops to his knees, sobbing, wringing his hands, and biting them, gibbering the woman's name in unbearable regret.

This looks like the ruthless persecution of a helpless woman by a merciless brute, such an atrocity as a white-slave driver would inflict on a hapless rebel against his vicious demands.

It might well be one of the numberless instances of a worthless husband compelling his wife to earn on the streets the money he squanders, and murdering her when she mutinies.

But, even so, why is a brute a brute? What inner torment persecutes him and drives him to the frenzy in which he persecutes some wretch else? For surely he who makes a victim of another must first have been himself the victim of something else.

Also, the chapter might have been the logical conclusion of an actual incident such as once a doctor told me of, in which a wife, mentally as bodily diseased, decoyed the young friend of her son to his ruin. The boy's father learned the truth and vowed to kill the siren. But that man did not keep his threat, and the husband never knew.

Or, imagine that the woman was, as has happened often enough, a spying traitress to her husband's country. She learned from him the plans of his regiment and sold them to the enemy, so that her husband led his men into the ambush she had made

possible. Having seen his comrades slaughtered and escaping from the death trap alone, he has realized that only his wife could have apprised the foe of his marching orders. And so he has returned to administer himself the punishment she has earned by all the laws of war.

Under this light, who wins your sympathy—the cowardly wretch who bartered her husband's secret or the vengeful wretch who feels that her destruction is the one last rite he owes to the butchered soldiers that trusted him? Perhaps you have even pity enough to spare for the woman suddenly beholding her own crime in all its loathsomeness and fleeing almost more from herself than from her husband, offering her own life as a sacrifice to save him from having to take it.

Yet, again, this man might be one of those countless sufferers who reluctantly recur to alcohol, and whom it occupies like an invading devil that wreaks incalculable mischief and then vanishes, allowing the bewildered soul to return and view, with wonder and horror, the evil done with his own hands and voice, but by another soul.

But this man was none of these. He was the pitiable slave of an occasional insanity, an inheritance he could not escape any more than certain districts can escape the tempests that haunt them.

This man loved this woman, and she him. But at times strange storms visited his mind and altered the aspect of everything, and then his wife became in his eyes a foul demon, an ancient succubus, whom heavenly voices seemed to bid him annihilate.

She had paid heavily before for those onsets, and her life had been saved with difficulty by people who

chanced to be near enough to come to her rescue. At last, at his own request, he had been put away in an asylum so that he might not hurt the woman he adored.

But after a long period of halcyon peace the guards had relaxed their vigilance over him, and when the madness stormed back into his poor brain he had found it easy to escape. With distorted cunning he had traced her to her lonely haven, and in the grisly light of his frenzy she had appeared once more to be a vile witch to be driven from the world she polluted.

Even in her panic she loved him, and felt sorrier for him than for herself, knowing how bitterly sorry he would feel for her when it was all too late.

Love gave her the final wisdom of pity and linked them in indissoluble bonds that could not be broken even in that whirling, overwhelming cyclone that we call life.

And so one might go on and on, taking old familiar stories and, as far as possible, changing the characters without changing the events, shifting the rays as the calcium man does in the theater.

Delilah and Samson could be presented with lights exchanged, so that she should be such a fiery patriot as Judith was, and he such a foreign brute as Holofernes was. And Judith could be made to appear a fiendish alien murderess and Holofernes a martyr to her cunning.

It is all in the lights. The French say that to understand everything is to forgive everything. Its corollary is true—not to forgive is not to understand. And one might well pray that the light should always

so shine through him and return to him that he would read everything in a glow of mercy.

But the worst of it is that one can never know. When the white ray of all light is broken into color, we see but a little of it. Our whole rainbow is only an inch or two in a spectrum a yardstick long.

The vast majority of colors we have never seen and never shall see, though we may boil water or take photographs and accomplish other miracles in the ultraviolet and infra-red regions where all is dark to our eyes.

Into those too radiant illuminations we can enter only by the imagination. And, after all, what else is sympathy but imagination exploring the infinite space between ourselves and our nearest neighbors?

IV

THE FATHER OF WATERS

I

FROM all four sides of her father's house the big river was visible.

It came splendidly down from somewhere up North, where she had never been, turned sharply to its left, marched gleaming past her father's house in an eternal parade, turned sharply to its right, and went tramping down South somewhere, where she had never been. Always and always it kept on going. The house was set at such an angle in the sickle blade that water was to be seen at any window.

As a wee child, Milly had thought that the Mississippi made that gigantic swerve just to keep from running over her father's house. She had heard it called the "Father of Waters," and had thought of it as a kindly stream. In her first geography lesson she had read of it, and felt greatly puffed up, as people do who meet their acquaintances' names in print.

Before she went to school—when that she was and a little tiny girl, a mere lapling—she had told her father that the river went round the house because it was good-hearted and kind. Her father chuckled till he almost shook her off the platform of his long legs, which made a bridge from his chair to the rail of the porch. But he agreed with her estimate of

the river's benevolence. He never tired of musing over the everlasting variety of the lights it echoed from the sky. Her mother complained that he had never had any ambition since they moved out there and he began to spend all his spare time mooning over that stupid old stream.

Her mother was always at work in the house. She could see no "sense" in the slow river, but her father found all wisdom there. He meditated upon it every evening and nearly all day Sundays. The smoke from his pipe puffed out like the smoke from the steamboats that went up and down the water.

One evening papa said that the river was like a person. It was always changin' and always the same; while you'd set and watch the worter slidin' past, and no two minutes runnin' was you lookin' at the same worter, but yet you was always a-lookin' at the same river. Folks were just like that—thoughts runnin' through 'em, teeth and hair comin' and goin', chairs and clothes wearin' out under 'em; but they was always the same folks.

Milly asked her father one day, "Was the Mississippi ever a baby river, papa?"

And he laughed like all-get-out; but he said:

"O' course it was, honey. You can tell by them there hills it's been a-growin' and a-growin'. A jollerjist can tell you just how many million years old it is. These bluffs is all fossils that was once as live as you and me. This river has took a good while to grow up. Maybe it's only a youngster yet. But it couldn't 'a' wore this path through them hills in a day or a week. No sirree-bob!"

"Papa," she said, "are we goin' to be fossils, too, some day, you and me?"

She remembered how slow he had smoked before he answered:

"I shouldn't be supprised, honey."

"And will folks pick us up out of a bluff a million thousand years from now, papa?"

"I shouldn't be supprised if they did."

Her mother had evidently been listening, for she came out and snatched Milly from his lap and said:

"If you got to have such wicked notions, Adna Hobday, you haven't got to fill this poor child's mind with 'em, have you?"

"No, I guess I haven't got to," her father had half sighed, half laughed.

Her mother had taken her in and made her study her Sabbath-school lesson; but Milly was lonesome for the river. She heard a steamboat mooing down on the levee, and later she heard the slow chuff-chuff of its smokestacks, the faint smack-smack of the paddles on the wheels, and the tinkle of the bells in the engine room. She wanted to go out on the porch and see the packet push by, but her mother told her to do as she was told for once.

Milly explained to her elder brother, Jesse, about how nice it was of the old Father of Waters to go round the house instead of right through the yard, and her brother whooped:

"Why, you dern fool! 'Ain't you no sense at tall, even for a girl? The old river goes round because this bluff is a big rock and the river can't budge it. Gosh all hemlock! And you thought the river was bein' polite to the house. Don't you know they built the house here and the whole town here, too, because this was a place where the river couldn't git in? Gee! you make me si-ick!"

Brother Jesse was his mother's boy, very practical and energetic. He would have made a rich man if he hadn't got caught in a backwater, one of the stagnant pools left by the rivers of commerce where they overflow and subside.

Milly was her father's girl. She inherited his ability to dream wide-eyed above waters. The river became so much a part of her life that it seemed to run through her soulscape as well as through her landscape. It was the very current of her blood.

When she was about six or seven the Father in heaven took her father on earth away from the world and from the back porch and from the contemplation of the father in the river.

Milly was very bitter. She had had three fathers in her life, and she could not forgive the invisible one for robbing her and the river of their favorite.

Her mother was horrified with her. She tried to teach Milly religion and resignation, but she only woke a fierce stubbornness in the child, especially when she forbade her to spend hours on the porch keeping her father's chair flopping back and forth with an uncanny and ghostly persistence.

Her mother could keep Milly off the porch, she could lock her in a room for punishment, but she could not lock her in any room where the river was invisible, for, you see, the house was set at such an angle that water was to be seen from any window.

But when Milly grew old enough to start to school she began to neglect the river a little. She was away all day, and of nights she had to study. She loved to study her schoolbooks, too.

The pushing stream of her life, having entered the Valley of School, suddenly rounded a curve and ran

into the Meadows of Love. Milly had reached the advanced age of seven before she learned what love is and what it does to a person. Boys had hitherto been to her eye only brothers more or less removed, more or less disgusting. But now she met Hugo Ludlum.

II

She saw him first in school. He sat a few rows ahead of her, and she was struck by the exceeding cleanliness of the back of his neck, the region abaft his ears, and his white collar. His hair was combed and brushed smooth, too. This was some new kind of boy.

Milly longed for a glimpse of his face, and when he turned round to watch the teacher at the side blackboard she almost cried aloud at his beauty. There was not a smooch on his skin anywhere, and the hand he raised to lean his cheek on was white. Even the fingernails lacked the black edging she had supposed to be universal among boys. She whispered her neighbor:

"Say, Edie, who's 'at boy with the shiny face?"

Edie whispered back:

"Why, don't you know Hugo Ludlum? He's tur'ble nice boy—never slaps your face nor pulls your hair nor nothin'."

Milly gazed on him with a tender awe. He was more absorbing than the Mississippi River.

She grew so desperate that she could not wait for recess and a formal presentation. She wrote on a piece of paper, "i lov u," rolled it up, and flung it at him. It landed on the desk of Ikey Goolup, the champion sloven of the school, and Milly almost

blazed out with chagrin lest he read it and accept her and marry her before she could stop him.

But Ikey Goolup assumed that the pellet was a spitball, and he made it his own, and with great violence and accuracy pasted it behind the ear of good little Charlie Nanry, who told the teacher on Ikey and had him sent to the principal for a hot palm.

In the excitement the incriminating document was lost sight of, to Milly's intense relief. At recess, the insane child brushed past Hugo, and whispered in hog Latin:

"I-gray ove-lay oo-yay!"

Hugo understood and fled. Milly pursued him for nearly two years before she got him infatuated.

He called on her once, and they sat on the porch, trying to think of something to say. The river suggested to Milly a topic.

"I s'pose you're just achin' for it to get warm enough to go in swim'n'."

"Oh, I never swim," said Hugo.

"Aw, go on!" said Milly, with light raillery.

"Honest, I don't!"

"Who'd 'a' s'pected a big boy like what you are would be a 'fraid cat."

"No," said Hugo, "I'm not afraid of the river, but mamma is. She's so scared of it she won't let me go near it."

Milly was more shocked to find her hero afraid of his mamma than of the river. She scoffed uproariously and whittled her finger at him until he explained:

"I'd love to go in with the fellows, but mamma carries on so. She says I'm all the children she's

got, and she cries, and so I promised her. It hurts me, but I'd rather hurt me than hurt her."

Milly saw that there were heroisms that she had not dreamed of.

"What's your mamma afraid of?" she asked.

"That I'll get drowneded."

"Oh, that old river wouldn't hurt you! That's the nicest old river that ever was."

"But boys do get drowneded, mamma says. She says every year the river takes just so many boys away. There was Billy Tatlow, you know, and Steve Shelley, and Robbie Pulver."

"That's so," said Milly. "I'd forgot about them."

"Mamma says she can't forget her own brother. He was drowneded tryin' to save an old lady when the *War Eagle* ran into the bridge and was wrecked and lots of people got drowneded."

"That's so," Milly whispered. "I 'member hearin' about that."

She sat and stared at the vast placid benevolence with a new wonder. Its twinkling surface had won her trust, but she thought now of the grim depths beneath. She saw strange eddies boring here and there like gimlets, and they looked cruel.

Later, when the swimming season came on, she begged her brother Jesse not to go in, but he gave her the laugh. She implored her mother not to let him go, but her mother told her not to be foolish—boys had to learn to swim.

Milly spent a day of terror, but Jesse came home none the worse for his adventure except for a large area of sunburn and an earache. Yet Milly was glad that Hugo did not go swimming, because that left him free to talk to her.

One summer afternoon, as Milly was going to walk past the Ludlum home in the hope of getting a glimpse of her cavalier, she met his mother just dashing through the gate in a panic of terror. She rushed past Milly without seeing her. The child turned and ran alongside, gasping:

"Wha—what's mat-tatter, Mizzizzuz Ludlum?"

Mrs. Ludlum panted:

"I'm worried about Hugo. He hasn't come home, and I've just had a premonition that he's gone swimming."

"But he promised you."

"I know; but he's only a boy, and I—I've had a premonition."

Milly did not know what a premonition was, but it was evidently something convincing. So she stumbled along with the frantic mother. They made their way out to the edge of the bluff, to the path where the boys went down to the river to swim.

Mrs. Ludlum could make out faintly, far below, a covey of pygmies in the water. A few steps down, and she fell heavily on one hip, and sat rocking back and forth, nursing her ankle. She said to Milly:

"Run on down and call Hugo—quick!"

Milly darted along the path sure-footedly as a little goat. She pushed through the sickly-sweet pawpaw shrubs. The hazel bushes smacked her in the face. Birds in flight sprinkled the air before her path. She paused on a jutting ledge in some trepidation. She was getting uncomfortably close to the swimming spot. She stood forth, and called into space:

"Oh, Hugo! Hugo Lud-lu-um!"

The boys stopped paddling and yelping. They

stood waist deep in the water. One or two dived off the bank for decency's sake. Milly looked the other way and called out of the side of her mouth. She heard her brother's well-known treble in the well-known spirit:

"Go on away from here! Ain't you 'shamed of yourself?"

"I want Hugo Ludlum! His mother wants him!"

"He's not here! He 'ain't been here! You go on away now, or I'll tell mamma on you!"

Milly scudded back to the top of the hill with the glorious news. Mrs. Ludlum picked herself up and limped home, incredulous until she saw Hugo on the front lawn fixing the hose so that it would shower the grass with diamonds.

His mother ran to him, and smothered him in her arms as if he had come back from the grave. He explained that he had lingered at the library over a book. He was awful sorry he had scared his mother. But she kissed him and blessed him, and felt that she had rescued her boy from the maw of the alluring youth-devouring river.

She insisted on making a festival of the supper, and compelled Milly to be guest of honor. It is always wonderful to children to eat the food of other families. An alien table is an island of adventure.

Milly felt that she was married already to Hugo, and it pleased her to fancy that the old couple was visiting the young folks-in-law.

After supper she and Hugo played dominoes, while Mr. Ludlum read the evening paper and Mrs. Ludlum read her work basket. The group was so soothingly peaceful that Milly put away the plan she had

cherished from the far-off days of her father's lap-kingdom.

She and her father had agreed that, when she grew up, she would marry the captain of a steamboat, so that she and her father could explore those mystic realms to the north whence the river came down, and those legendary lands to the south that the river kept visiting.

Sometimes her father would take her down to the levee to watch a packet come in or a freighter take on cargo. Milly could not tell whether she was more fascinated by the human cargo in fine clothes or the stuff that went aboard in boxes on the shoulders of the darky roustabouts.

There was a friend of her father's, young Harley Stannard, only twenty, and already first mate of the *Molly Moore*. And once he took her on his shoulders and carried her about the boat. It was a wonderful place, and Harley said he was going to marry her when she grew a little older. And she had agreed.

One of her first experiences of human perfidy was the news that he had married another woman without asking her. She had found out the depths of human levity, too, for when she had protested, "I don't think he's very nice to not wait for me," her father had laughed and told her to hurry and grow or all the men would be married up.

She thought of this now, and was glad that she had not married Mr. Stannard before she met Hugo Ludlum. Besides, she could now revenge herself on him.

She would be more than satisfied to be the wife of Hugo, who would some day inherit the magnificent hat store of his father. He had indeed clerked there

on several occasions, and had been permitted to paste the gilt initials of customers in the nobby headware they bought, the famous "Fifth Avenue" felts and "college straws" for which Mr. Ludlum was the sole and exclusive agent in Carthage.

Mr. Ludlum was as round all over as the crown of any of the derbies he sold. He was forever laughing, a contagious chuckle like the noise that boys made running along the street with a stick pressed against the picket fence in front of Miss Malkan's.

On this night Hugo and Milly grew so frantic over a domino crisis that they fell to laughing wildly. Mr. Ludlum dropped his paper and stood by them and laughed with them. This set them off again. Every time they gave out, he set that ratchety chuckle going, and away they went.

Milly often had these spasms of giggle, epilepsies of unwelcome amusement, especially in church. She laughed now till she was faint, sick, suffocated. Mrs. Ludlum made her husband let her alone. Then Milly began to cry for no reason at all. She ran home all by herself.

After that, Mr. Ludlum was more careful.

Late that summer, Milly wandered over to see her future mother-in-law. Hugo was away, and Mrs. Ludlum, who was always fretful without him, welcomed his other feminine adorer. She explained that he had gone across the river with the Congregationalist Sunday-school picnic. Milly said:

"Oh yes; Jesse has gone to that, too."

"I thought your mother went to the Baptist church."

"Oh, mamma does; but Jesse goes to the church that's havin' the next picnic."

Mrs. Ludlum permitted Milly to help her in the kitchen.

"I'm going to have Hugo's favorite dessert to-night —floating island."

"Oh, I'd like to learn how to make that!" cried Milly. "I really ought to, you know, so's that—"

She paused and blushed. Mrs. Ludlum smiled. She need not be jealous of Milly yet.

At last everything was ready but the prodigal. Mr. Ludlum came rolling up the street and sat on the porch with his wife and their tiny daughter-in-law-to-be.

They kept watching for Hugo.

Suddenly round the corner whirled a shabby old depot hack; it was plainly empty, but the well-known negro driver seemed to be in a desperate hurry. He lashed the horses to a run.

"Wonder who's goin' to miss his train to-night," laughed Mr. Ludlum.

But the driver turned in to the Ludlum curb, threw his weight backward, and checked the horses so sharply that they slid and their shoes scratched sparks from the stone.

The driver stood up in his pulpit, and shouted at the porch:

"Oh, Miz' Ludlum, your boy's drowned!"

Then he struck out with his whip; the horses plunged; the hack careened round the next corner, and was gone.

III

Good news can wait or walk. Bad news takes a hack and has the horses whipped.

That black messenger of Death never explained

his fierce haste to be the first to blast the happiness of that home.

He had nothing against the Ludlums. Nobody had. Everyone loved them—except Luck.

Milly forgot her own anguish, her own premature widowhood, before the spectacle of that plaintive little couple smitten to a madness of grief at the destruction of their only child, their final child.

They beat the air so frantically with their hands; they clung together so like two blind wretches sinking in a current; they made such drowning, gurgling, choking noises that Milly fled from them in panic.

She was afraid to tell her own mother the woeful thing. She was not like the hack driver. She hated bad news.

Jesse was very late for supper. He came in scared and craven, with a kind of guilt upon him for being even a spectator at such a scene. From his broken, reluctant account, it was easy to understand what had happened.

A crowd of boys, wearying of the inanity of Sunday-school merriment, had struck out through the woods for any adventure that might offer itself. Hugo had been hurried along with them. They had suddenly come out upon a shining floor of sand with a flood of shallow crystalline water pirouetting across it.

They had snatched away their clothes and darted in. Hugo alone had abstained. From the warm, gay bath they had called to him, dared him to come in. He had refused, remembering his mother. They had made fun of him, called him "Cowardy-calf," "Mamma's boy," "Miss Priss."

He was human—for once. He felt the tremendous

pressure of young public opinion. Suddenly he whipped off his neat clothes; he piled them in an orderly fashion. He had never undressed before in the presence of boys to whom nakedness was commonplace. He made haste to hide himself in the water. It gave him an unimagined delight. He wondered that he had lived so long without this better half of a Mississippi boy's amphibious existence.

The other urchins swam, dived, turned rude somersaults, tried to see who could stay under the longest.

Hugo wished that he had learned to swim. He kept trying, marveling at the buoyancy of his friends and his own leaden awkwardness. The place was full of deep spots, holes, abrupt step-offs. Hugo must have wandered into some such trap just after the other boys had all seized their noses, gulped deep breaths, and ducked under in a final test of endurance.

When they came up spluttering, one by one, and had quarreled awhile over who had stayed down longest, they called to Hugo to decide. He did not answer. They could not find him.

His clothes were on the bank in their neat array. The boys were terrified. They could imagine him sinking suddenly, coming up, strangling, beating the water, crying vainly, perhaps, across the surface, where never a head showed.

They imagined him turning, smothering, fighting —thinking of his poor mother, no doubt.

They grew afraid of this lying, cheating river. Even here, in this innocent little bayou, it had waylaid one of them and devoured him. They ran out on the sand in panic.

Then, as Jesse said, they grew mad at the river. They dived in, and swam here and there, thrusting down to the depths with eyes open and staring, their fingers traveling along the bottom, feeling for poor Hugo Ludlum.

They sought him till they were worn out. Eddies twisted them; slippery arms seemed to drag at them. They, too, had mothers to think of. They dressed and left the place and Hugo's clothes. They hurried back to the picnic and turned it to a funeral.

Men ran from there to the river and plunged; boats were found, and the search in the deepening twilight of the water was going on now.

From the porch of the house Milly could see lights moving on the other side of the river.

Milly's mother ran over to Mrs. Ludlum's to hold her on this side of madness.

Mr. Ludlum was down at the river hunting for grappling hooks.

IV

Three days later the river spewed up what it had made of the slim, silvery youth it had kidnapped. The sight revolted the strangers who found the body bumping against the mud banks three miles below. They tried to keep Mr. Ludlum from looking; but he did. He kept his wife from looking into the coffin. It had to be a much bigger coffin than one would have expected.

Milly went back to her porch habit. She could not keep her eyes off the river. She studied it as one might study the face of a trusted friend who had been guilty of perfidy.

She asked it, "Why?"

She saw sunflood, sunset, moonrise, star-shower. Sometimes, waking from a nightmare that tried to drown her in her own bed, she would steal to the window and watch the daybreak draw the black shroud of night slowly from the stream, watched it turn from the darkling shudder of a blacksnake's skin to the autumnal tints of a copperhead's scales and to the gold and sapphire of just a great river a mile wide. But she could not love it any more. She feared it now. The shimmer of its surface was always a sinister quivering; it was reptile, ophidian.

Early that fall the river captured a second boy, Charlie Nanry, a poor boy from the other side of Main Street, who had been running across one of the great rafts that floated dead forests down to the Southern sawmills. A log had rolled under his nimble feet too quickly for him, and he had slid down into the river. The logs had closed over him.

That winter two young men skated across a sheet of thin ice. They were not found till the next spring.

Milly began to keep toll of the human sacrifices the old river demanded of the populace it enriched by the traffic it bore and the regions it watered. She read in the papers the names of boys in other towns who were pulled in as by crocodiles.

A skiff ran on a snag and sank with half a dozen men and women. Two steamers collided. A barge with people on it turned turtle. A small traveling circus boat caught fire. The river did not put out the fire, but it gathered in people and animals.

Milly wanted to move away from the river. But people do not move away from danger.

She read of other rivers that killed, of floods that

swept over dikes, invaded streets, split concrete dams, mowed down villages, set houses spinning like tops through strange scenes.

She read of the Gulf of Mexico and its sudden uprising against Galveston. She read of the ocean and its tidal waves at Messina, of accidents at sea, of the *Titanic* and the iceberg.

She was haunted by an overwhelming horror of deep water, and, one day at church, when the preacher spoke of the deluge that drowned the world, she had to rise and tiptoe up the aisle to escape a threatening paroxysm of fear. But she outgrew this obsession as she outgrew her childhood, her dresses, her schoolbooks, her little-girl ideas. She grew used to the old river and forgot it again in the stream of the new terrors and raptures that sweep a girl along.

At length, she was a beautiful woman, nubile, and besought in homage by the town youth and by out-of-town youth.

Even Capt. Harley Stannard paid clumsy court to her. He commanded a homely old freight boat that plied between St. Louis and St. Paul and made her town a halfway stop on each trip. He was a widower now, with a little motherless daughter.

Milly liked him, and she came to know the voice of his old side-wheeler, the *Amy J.*, named after his deceased wife. Usually he saluted her home on the bluff with two long calls and two short ones from the hoarse whistle. He meant it as a gallantry, but Milly could not get over the feeling that it was the ghastly voice of the dead woman hooting at her.

Besides, a handsome young fellow from Boston came to town at that critical period and paid Commonwealth attentions to the nineteen-year-old vil-

lager, with devastating effect. He promised to take her East on the honeymoon when he went back the following summer; nobody else had a chance against a young man with a pleading background of all that the Eastern glories mean to the children of the Middle West. So Milly Hobday consented to become Mrs. Lawrence Trippet come next June.

V

Carthage was gay that fall, and Larry Trippet said that even Newport had nothing to offer more charming than the river dances of Milly's home town; for it was a custom there to charter a steamer to push a barge several miles up the river on moonlight nights, and drift back; and the lower floor of the barge was made for dancing, with a platform for the band and a corner for refreshments; the upper deck was like a roof garden in Tunis, where couples could snuggle together in the full moon glory and whisper their communions while dulcet breezes fanned young men's glowing cheeks with the cool curls of young women, and the old steamer's smokestacks puffed like the pipes of a great organ intoning bridal music.

During the winter there were many dances and Milly saw little of the river except for a glimpse of it late, as she bade Larry long good-nights. It was very still under its complete armor of ice, and everything in the world was so perfect that the fears of the past could not obtrude on the dreams of the future.

At the first warnings of spring the river grew noisy. The ice began to split with the sound of a cannonade. It began to move in solid sheets; these grew brittle

and broke raggedly into cakes that crowded and jostled, climbed and bucked like passing droves of white cattle, lowing all night and all day.

The stampede raged against the piers of the bridge and against the stone ricks set up to protect them from the onslaughts of the ice packs.

Open spaces of dark water appeared and disappeared, and one could feel that spring would soon give back the river to its old dominion.

It would cease to be a gray warrior and become again the mirror of all the color moods of the sky.

In the forenoon of spring came flocks of wild duck.

They kept away from the town but fluttered about the bayous on the other side and sat upon the clear intervals of open water.

Hunters went out along the opposite banks, but it was necessary to explore the ice wilderness in boats to retrieve the quarry.

And then, to Milly's horror, Larry Trippet revealed an interest in this sport. He spoke lightly of his plan to cross the river in a skiff and to bring her home a feast of game.

When she protested he laughed. When she forbade him to go he disclosed an unsuspected willfulness. When she wept with fear, her tears slid off his heart as if it were a duck's back. When she grew frantic, he left her and went to his boarding house.

The next morning she woke early. She glanced from her window to the river. The sky was a raw gray, and filled with clouds like shadows of the cakes of ice. The sky was a dismal parody of the river. There were no boats among the ugly blocks of floating steel.

After breakfast, she went again to the chilly porch.

Now she saw a skiff well out in the stream. One man rowed, and one man leaned across the bow with a shotgun in his arm. She knew him at once for Larry Trippet by the red cap she had knitted him to wear when he went skating in spite of her pleas. She recognized Tim Nanry, too, a levee loafer, elder brother of the Nanry boy who had been drowned years and years before.

The old fright gripped Milly's heart. She shouted from the porch, but the wind blew her voice back into her mouth. She ran into the house, flung on a heavy cloak, and hurried along the streets to the top of a long wooden stairway leading to the river level. There were a hundred and twenty-four steps in that turning, rickety flight. The steps were slippery with frost, but she got down them somehow without accident.

She called from the shore, but the boat had dwindled beyond reach. It looked pitifully small as it tossed in the current, twisting this way and that to avoid the ice throngs.

Here, at the water's edge, the full speed of the current was evident. It chased past, with reeling floes of ice grinding together like shears. Some of them were shot into the air and fell upon others and bore them under, only to be smothered beneath the next plunging bulk.

From this level Milly could hardly see the boat. She bethought her of the bridge, and ran to it with a feeling that disaster impended and that she must not fail to witness it.

Her breath was puffing white like her father's pipe smoke. Her heart hurt her as if some one were jabbing half-open scissors into her breast.

She met Captain Stannard with his little girl in hand. The captain's boat was moored for the winter, and he was getting impatient for the spring to release her from the jail of ice.

"What's your hurry, Milly?" he said. "Slow down and take a walk with the little one and me."

"I can't!" she gasped. "There is a skiff out in the river, and I'm afraid it may be in danger from the ice."

"Well, you can't help much from here, can you?" said the captain. "I guess they're safe enough. Lots of fellows go out. They're after ducks, I suppose."

"Yes, I suppose so. But I was kind of worried."

"Oh, I wouldn't worry, if I was you."

"Oh yes, you would, if you were me."

"Well, maybe I would. Who's in the boat?"

She hardly liked to fling Larry Trippet's name in his face just then. So she said:

"Two men. They're too far away now to see just who they are."

Then she ran on. But he followed, dragging the anchor of the little girl.

Half a mile out on the bridge Milly paused and leaned on the rail, gasping. She peered into the distance, where the petty boat fared slowly its tortuous path. She heard the faint crack of the shotgun; she saw wild ducks rise and wheel away.

She wished that Larry were braving death for some other purpose than to inflict it upon innocent passengers through the sky. She had always grieved over the sight of slain wild ducks hung on hooks in the markets or drooping in long strings of glossy beauty and pitiful from the arms of gunners.

Captain Stannard and his child came up and stood peering into the distance.

From this eyrie the river had a fearful vastitude and the boat was a mere speck, like a wee wild duck sitting there awaiting its doom from the hunting river. Everywhere ice blades clashed like bayonets. There was a chaos of eddies, of snarling, blundering beasts, in a mob of sullen wrath. Below her, the ice flashed beneath the bridge or charged the battlement with a crash and a cry. It seemed to rush at her in wolfish ferocity, to leap and snap and to fall back with a baffled rage. Everywhere the river was one seethe of hatred, of gnashing teeth, of ruthless malignity.

When she searched the bitter wilderness for the boat she could hardly find it again—it was so tiny and so far away. But it was not so far away that she was spared the vision of what she had dreaded.

Suddenly the dot was changed to a dash. She realized that the skiff had been thrust up into the air by some lurching floe. She could just see the two little figures in it sprawling in air with outstretched arms against the gray.

VI

The boat vanished from the eyes of the watchers on the bridge, and the men with it. Milly could not make a sound. Her soul was occupied with the business of what Larry's death would mean to her. Then she descried, on a big cake of ice, a struggling figure. It stood up, seemed to shake itself and wave its arms.

Her keen vision, focused like an arrow, made out

a dot of red. It must be the cap she had made with her own hands. Larry, at least, was saved. She slipped down to her knees and prayed: "Thank God! Oh, thank you, God!" She rose again and sent her vision out into the foggy blue through a flood of tears.

Slowly the figure of her man enlarged. He was drifting toward her. She laughed with a bliss of hope. She pounded her cheeks with her fists and laughed, because, after all, the crafty old river was defeated of its prey.

She was sorry for poor Nanry. He must have gone down deep. Perhaps he was beating now at the white ceiling of the river. She could see that the boat had come to light again, but it was floating bottom side up, shoved and gored by the ice floes, and bunted far from Larry's reach. It was being left behind, indeed, by the swift raft that carried him to safety.

But to what safety? The ice could only bear him to the bridge and dash him against the stone rap or sweep through between the piers and carry him on down until some of the leaping stallions of ice trampled him under and he joined Nanry in the appalling realm beneath.

She was frenzied with her helplessness. She found now that, besides Captain Stannard and his sobbing child, other people were clinging to the bridge rail like the rapt watchers at an arena. Teamsters had checked their horses to watch. A big freight engine, moving slowly across the bridge, had come up behind her, unnoticed on the tracks, and had stopped while the crew stood at gaze in futile indolence.

She ran to the engine and cried up at the fireman:

"Something must be done to save that poor man! Quick! Do something! Do something!"

"What, lady?" the fireman maundered at her.

Captain Stannard was inspired with a suggestion.

"Get a rope! Haven't you got a rope you could lower to him?"

The fireman shook his head in stolid idiocy, and the engineer, leaning over his sill, called down:

"What would we be doing with a rope?"

Captain Stannard was resourceful. He said:

"I've got a cable on shore somewhere. Come along, boys! Here, Milly, take care of my baby."

He put a little hand in hers and clambered up into the cab. He rang the bell; the engine snorted, chuffed; the great drive wheels turned slowly and less slowly. The engine stormed away with increasing speed and dwindled down the tunnel of the ironwork.

Milly ran back to the rail, clutching the doll's mitten of the little girl, who stared through the net of iron. Larry was much larger now. He was as big as a child, and he grew every moment. She could see that he was flailing himself with his arms to beat up a little warmth in his poor body. She could hear him calling, but she could not make out the words.

She ran out to the track. The engine was gone from the bridge. She darted to the rail. Larry was a young lad. She could distinguish what he was crying. It was: "Help! Help!"

She shrieked at him: "Wait! Wait! Don't give up!"

She dashed to the track again. The engine was a mote in the distance. Its bell was calling with a tongue of gold:

"I'm coming! I'm coming! Make way!"

To and fro she ran. Larry was a man now, her own man. She could make out his beloved features and the agony in them.

And now the engineer and the fireman were tumbling out of the cab with Captain Stannard. A huge cable spilled after them in writhing coils.

They carried it to the rail and began to pay it out. Milly leaned far over to watch it. She would have fallen, but Captain Stannard caught her by the knees and pressed her back. And now the rope was hanging as from heaven—and it reached! The passing cakes of ice knocked its frayed tip aside. Captain Stannard and the engineer and the fireman and a knot of other men moved this way and that to present the rope to Larry at just the point of his approach.

He came toward it like a circus rider standing on the back of a white charger galloping. Milly could see the fierce look of hope in his eyes. He was greedy for life, but he set his jaws and remembered to be calm. The steed he rode turned aside from the sharp barrier of the ice break and took the smooth course between the piers. And now, with a gleam of joy, it ran beneath the bridge and was gone from sight.

Larry was free of it. He had seized the rope in his firm grip and was trying to climb it hand over hand.

Milly was laughing with a ferocity of joy, and shouting to him a fierce welcome.

The men on the bridge began to haul in the rope at Captain Stannard's command:

"Easy, now! Heave away! Whoa!"

Larry rose slowly, like a spider climbing its own

gossamer. Milly was smiling down at his splendid battling eagerness. Her face, like a looking-glass, mimicked his. The zest of life changed to an uncertainty—a startled anxiousness, a grim frenzy, a ghastly understanding of the leering wit of Fate.

His frozen hands were slipping along the rope; his numb fingers were but wooden pulleys on the rope. The rope came up with a sudden lightness, for Larry had slid down its length, had gone down into the water like a leaden plummet.

Captain Stannard was so furious at the defeat that he began to climb to the rail. He would have dived blindly in, but his little child caught at him, and screamed:

"Papa! Papa! Don't leave me!"

Even Milly put out her hand idly to stay him from the useless sacrifice. And he dropped back, breathing heavily.

Beneath her eyes Milly saw only a rush of ice—ice everywhere beneath, above, all across the river, on to the horizon, streaming down from the north —endless fragments of ice.

VII

The river was beautiful again with summer, absolved and renewed in innocence again, before Milly was able to bear the sight of it. She crept out to the porch from her bed, and there it was as before, wide, serene, a playground of sunbeams, a miracle of jewelry. She could hear the faint shouts of boys swimming in it. It was a Saturday, and school was out. New boys had grown up to go down to the river and pay the tax it exacted every year.

As the pious Hindu lives unresistingly among the cobras that slay his people and may some day slay him, so Milly accepted the river, worshiped it in a way, hated it, revered it. There was no use fighting it. It could not be killed or driven away or appeased. Its whims could not be foretold. It was a god; it had its own reasons, its own way.

She stared at it now, and wondered at its cruelty, and could not deny it responsibility. She tried to employ her reason and accept it as a simple accident, a congress of waters electing the valley that lay easiest to its passage. But her reason lost the wrestle with the ancient instinct that coerced her into feeling that it was a being, a monster, alive, moody, basking, replete, purring, hungry, ravening, insatiable.

Milly was as helpless before the river as before the long, white star-stream across the heavens. She was such a little thing and they were both so unthinkably huge. They broke her brain as their influences broke her heart.

Helpless as the river to change its course or be other than it was, she let the waters of life flow through her. The ice about her heart melted and ran away. Warm floods of happiness over little things like health and music and averted misfortunes and pains assuaged, made spring and summer in her soul. Autumn came, and winter was bleak once more. But spring was just as ruthless.

She hated to be glad of anything after the sorrows she had known, but, in spite of herself, she knew happiness at times, and she knew the yearnings for love, too.

The life of the town, of the nation, flowed on like

another river—an invisible river that carried some to prosperity and fame and others to shame and to death.

People's emotions, loves, hates, appetites for food, drink, and attention, for kisses and money, warmth, ecstasy, wild words, bright pieces of gold, and shining stones, for converts to religions or passions or political creeds—everything was rivers flowing through hearts.

On dark nights, in the moonlight on the shadowy steps of the river banks, on the glowing porches, in the dimly lighted rooms, strange streams of desire were enriching certain souls and drowning others. Behind the curtains, under the dark awnings of the trees along the walks, rivers of dark longing were bearing people beyond their depths, swirling them in eddies that lost them their sense of direction.

Passions froze into ice and chilled the currents of kindliness, and the ice went out in rushes of hatred —loud quarrels that wrecked families and tore kinsfolk apart. Then warm winds and warm waters put to sleep not only hatred, but the rigors of duty, too; and dear, sweet people who meant well drifted into currents that swept them out of their depths. Young couples, wading cautiously among emotions, came to step-offs and were drowned in mad raptures of horror, clutching at each other to mutual ruin.

Milly, going by the school one day, where she had been a little girl and had fallen in love with Hugo Ludlum, saw that there was commotion among the petty citizens of the girls' school yard. It was recess, but instead of the usual riot of games there was a hush of ill omen.

Somebody's daughter moved here and there and

put all the others to flight. Milly watched them, wondering if the lonely child had some contagion that the others feared. But she saw, by the upturned noses and the sneering retreat of the others from her approach, that the contagion was moral and social.

She saw the ostracized tot pause and clench her eyelids against scalding tears, and then run to the fence and hide her face in her arms and weep in an ague of despair.

Milly called to one of the children—the little Stannard girl it was:

"Oh, Amy, come here, please! Who is the child that is crying?"

Amy answered: "Don't you know? That's Lulu Kennen."

"What has she done?"

"Nothin'."

"Then why do you treat her so?"

Amy flushed and stammered and ran away.

As Milly waited and wondered, the bell rang; the children swarmed back into the hive and their noise was quenched.

The Kennen child noted the silence, turned, and found herself alone in the desert of the empty school yard. Milly knew that the child's mother was dead. She had gone fishing with her husband from a barge and had fallen into the river. Milly felt a double pity for her. The little girl was more afraid of solitude than of the mob. She ran to the school door, paused, and dreaded to enter. Then she made the terrific resolve to play truant, and came stealthily toward the gate.

She was startled when she found Milly waiting for her. She shrank back, but Milly put out her hand.

Lulu took it in amazed obedience to the gesture of an elder.

"What's the matter, Lulu?" Milly asked.

"I'm all right, I guess. I'm just goin' home. I don't want to go to this school no more."

"Why not?"

"'Cause the girls won't play with me."

"Why won't they? What have you done?"

"Nothin'. They don't mind me, 'cept they say —they say my sister has been awful bad."

"Your sister Rosie?"

"Yessum."

Milly had known Rosie, a pretty thing with a lot of youth in her glowing cheeks and a vague reputation for recklessness.

"Why, what has Rosie done?" she asked, anxiously.

"She 'ain't done nothin', neither, but only be sick. Aunt Judy came over and was afraid Rosie was goin' to die, and Rosie cried awful hard; but she's lots better now, and the doctor came and brought her the cutest little baby. But the yother chillern say she's bad and they won't play with me, and I don't see why. Do you?"

Milly felt her heart grow sick. The river of Life had caught Rosie Kennen off her feet and drowned her, and now it flung her back to the daylight, a repulsive wreck. She felt that, somehow, the hand of the child in hers carried a stain of the tragedy. She felt a desire not to be seen with the innocent victim, but she was ashamed of the desire to escape from her compromising charity, and fought down her impulse to disengage her hand from the fingers wrapped about hers like little cold fishing worms.

She forced herself to walk home with Lulu. But she could not force herself to go in and speak comfort to the girl who had found the current too swift.

The next afternoon Milly read in the paper the story of the drowning of Lulu Kennen. She sprang to the porch rail to stare at the river. What was its fearful power that even a lonely child should go to it?

The paper told how a man, mowing grass on the bluff, had seen a little girl loitering about the bank, far below. He had wondered what she was looking for. He saw her take off her hat, put a paper in it, and a small stone on the paper, then walk straight down into the water. After a few hesitant steps she had suddenly disappeared, then come up again, her face lost in the mass of her hair as in seaweed. The current had caught her and dipped her under and lifted her up. It was like a baptism.

He had run toward her, shouting, but a passing railroad train had cut him off from the shore, and when it had gone he could see no trace of her.

The only record of her bitter career was her hat, and in it this note:

Dere rosie ime sorie to leaf yu but nobodie woant play wit me so ime goan to tri to finde mama ile give her yur love yur loveign sistre lulu. tel papa goodby wen he cums hoam.

Milly felt the little fishing worms of the child's fingers about her own, and shuddered. The fingers seemed to cling and squirm, then let go slowly.

She ran to her mother with the story. Her mother shook her head and wisely closed her heart against a tragedy that she could not cope with. She protected herself with a canny saying:

"It looks like a punishment on Rosie Kennen,

don't it? I hope it 'll be a lesson to her—and to some of these other girls that go about so free."

"Oh, mother!" Milly groaned, and stole away from her. A punishment! Were these all punishments, these deaths? Was Hugo Ludlum seized by an angry, spying school-teacher of a Deity because he could not resist the appeal of bright waters? Was Larry Trippet tortured and teased with hope as an extra rebuke for risking his safety in the ice? Were the *War Eagle's* victims punished for trusting the brave, proud vessel that carried them to their fate?

Some impulse of protest drove Milly to the home of Rosie Kennen, who was punished with life, as with death, as if the little daughter she had incurred had crowded the little sister from a pier into the river.

On her way she met Amy Stannard stumbling along, her eyes lost in tears. She saved the girl from walking off into a ditch, and asked her why she was crying.

"'Cause I been mean to Lulu, and I wouldn't speak to her. And she's went and drownded herself, and Jesus don't like me no more, and I don't like myself, and I ought to go and jump in the river, too, only for not being good enough and too scared, too. Oh, I'm so mis'ble! I wisht I was dead, 'stead of Lulu."

Milly took her home and went on to the home of Rosie. The old vines were a shroud about the place. The very doorposts seemed to bear a warning that the plague had been here.

She heard, before she knocked, the cry of a peevish infant with a just grudge against the world. Rosie's shamefaced aunt opened the door and looked star-

tled when she recognized Milly. She was voluble with the disgrace, and she, too, prated of punishment.

Rosie was abject. She had fallen from the wild chariot of Romance and the wheels had passed over her. She poured out upon Milly's heart the long story of her ignominy. She was still more amazed than repentant. Her repeated question was:

"Why? Why did all this have to happen to me? Other girls have been worse than what I was, and nobody even knew. I didn't mean to be bad. You believe me, don't you?"

A score of times Milly vowed that she believed her. And she did. She was worn out, at last, with the vanity of pity.

Rosie had drowned in Life more hopelessly than Lulu in Death.

It was the river of Life that was to blame for the death of souls. Some dived in without heed and swam about at will. Some were dragged or thrust in, and the waters closed over them. All mankind kept playing about the bank, and this insatiable river also collected its annual toll of victims from the youth of the town.

Seeing the havoc it had wrought in the once all-mirthful Rosie, Milly suddenly understood the treachery of love. She had felt its calm, enticing warmth, and had recoiled from its sudden rushes. Now she grew more afraid of its mysterious, invisible, eternal current than of the other Mississippi.

VIII

She grew afraid of life, of friendships, even. She went to no more parties, looked on the moonlight

alone, and watched the world from her porch as she watched the river.

By and by her mother died, and grew tenderer in memory than she had been in life. Jesse, the rough boy, became a man, a machinist of a certain cleverness.

Her mother left the house to Milly. It was all she had, so she stayed there, telling herself that she hated the river, but never quite daring to divorce herself from it.

Her brother married and could spare her no more money; so she took to giving music lessons. There were many children in town whose parents wanted to keep them out of mischief by chaining them to piano stools. Milly's fees were very reasonable, if one did not demand too much information or skill for the money. So she kept alive in the pinched existence of a condemned old maid.

One of her pupils was the swiftly growing daughter of Capt. Harley Stannard, still a peripatetic widower. Amy had grown by now to the age for embarking in a shallop of romance. She wanted to make music for the allurement of youth and the expression of the melodies dancing through her heart. She was engaged to at least one young man, and spent a large part of her lesson hours telling Milly how wonderful he was.

Milly, a resigned old maid, began to feel an envy of so much bliss—an envy, even, of the danger.

She had moored her heart against the dock to wait decay, but the winter began to wane in spite of her.

Sometimes when the *Amy J.* was laid up for repairs or cargo or was in hibernation, Captain Stan-

nard would be seen in the offing of Amy's music lessons.

Milly grew used to him as to the river. He began to talk with her as she left the house. Sometimes she would linger for a few words with him after Amy had been reprieved and allowed to escape. Sometimes Captain Stannard would stroll home with Milly.

The next winter, especially, he paid her courtesy. On cold days he hated to let her go into the lonely house alone. She hated to leave him outside on the walk. They seemed to realize each other's feelings; but, of course, she could not invite a man into her house.

That was a long winter, and it grew more and more difficult for Milly to keep from saying the terrible words:

"Won't you come in a minute, Captain?"

It was spring that dissolved the ice into a gentle dew. And one spring evening the captain came over and rang her doorbell. She went out to him, and they sat on the porch a long while.

He came again, and he began to urge her to give up her lonely life and take pity on his lonely life.

She had not the courage to say, "Yes," or yet "No." She did not answer at all, which would have been answer enough for anybody but the sort of man the captain was.

Then, one balmy evening, when the very air was an appeal, when the breeze had fingers to caress the hair and mellow the heart of one, the captain called, and, after a long while of lazy talk, he said:

"Milly, I'm taking my boat out again to-night. She starts her trips again. You've never been up

the river—or down it, either, for that matter—have you?"

"No, Captain."

"Well, why in thunder don't you come along with me and make a real voyage for once?"

"Why, Captain!"

"As m' wife, o' course."

"Why, Captain!"

"We'll be loaded along about ten o'clock, I guess. We could get married to-morrow, somewheres up the river, if you feel shy about goin' to church with me here. You could sleep in my cabin. I'll be up all night, anyways. It would rest you consid'able to sleep on the water, I imagine. Why don't you? You're gettin' nowheres, here all by yourself, and I'm gettin' nowheres but old, and up and down the river. Amy is gettin' ready to marry; then I'll be as alone as you are. I think we'd make out right well together, Milly. Come on and gimme a chance to make you happy, you poor, sweet child! I just can't bear to leave you here alone another summer. Won't you come along, Milly honey—won't you?"

The only argument against his prayer was that there was no argument against it. Milly had grown to suspect smooth surfaces. They meant hidden danger. She did not believe in happiness any more. She hated herself for it, but all she could say was:

"Thank you ever so much, Captain. But I don't see how I could."

He seemed to read the hopelessness in her very kindliness. He groaned:

"All right for you! Good night."

It wrung her heart to watch him go. The click

of the gate that let him out sounded like the click of a jail door locking her in.

The click of her own door behind her was a double lock. As she paused in the empty blackness of the house she wondered why she was such a fool.

A great glow of light at a window told her why. It was the river. She was afraid to leave it.

It drew her out to the porch.

The grandeur of it in the sheen of moonlight smote her to an awe. It had sapped her life. It had taken her lovers away, her childhood sweetheart, and the husband of her choice. It was jealous of her. She was the bride of the Mississippi. It would tolerate no rivals.

She had tried to give her heart elsewhere, but it had taken swift revenge in murder. If she had accepted the happiness, the comfort, the companionship, at least, the captain offered, the river would undoubtedly have slain him, too. His boat would have gone down in some wild conspiracy, and he would have joined Hugo and Larry.

But what a mockery of wedlock was hers! The river gave her no recompense for her devotion. It was one of those gods that take all the slaughter of doves and lambs and blood and life, and never relent or answer a prayer.

Suddenly a queer thought pierced her. She had never gone to the river. She had never given herself into the hands of this mystic spouse of hers. She had feared him or admired him from afar. What if she should go to him as a bride and trust him?

Well, and if she did, what wedding gift could he give her? Just one: peace—unbroken peace. Troubles and disappointments and anguishes and

fatigues and all the uglinesses of the world were visited upon people who walked the earth. But for those who went down into the waters there was the bliss of silence. There would be a little suffering at first—such terror as brides endure—but thereafter and ever after, peace.

She seemed to understand at last what the river had been trying to tell her all these years. She heard it calling now. With its countless eyes it watched her, and its low murmur was the one word, "Come!" repeated over and over.

IX

Without pausing for a shawl or a hat she descended from the porch to the grass, and slipped down the steep terrace to a toppled gate in the lower fence. It opened on a grassy, unused road that led into the traveled street.

Without once losing sight of the river, she made her way to the long and rickety hundred and twenty-four steps. She slipped down these without taking her eyes from the hypnosis of the shining, shivering stream.

No one else was abroad at this moment, and she crossed the gravelly railroad tracks to the brim of the river—the spot where she had come down to watch Larry Trippet's boat.

Then there had been a huddle of ice; now there was a gush of molten silver. She went with gingerly steps to the margin, where the water felt along the pebbles with white, searching fingers. She was mortally afraid, but the wet earth gave way beneath her slippers. Her ankles were clasped by warm hands. The edge of her skirt was fluttered by the eddies.

Suddenly she was in to her knees. She put a cautious foot forward, but she found no support for it. She was on the edge of one of those step-offs that had betrayed so many who could not swim.

She could not swim. She was afraid. She tried to return to the bank. She writhed backward, twisting at the waist, clutching for the solid earth.

There seemed to be a great scurry in the waters, as if some one rose from them to grasp her. With a weak cry of utter fear she whirled round. Her hands clutched cinders and rough mussel shells. But they were good.

She was free of the river again. Firm ground was beneath her. Her feet squeaked in her wet shoes; her skirts dripped, but she was out of the danger.

She was stricken with a palsy of terror. She was too weak to face the long climb to her lonely house. She stumbled along the railroad track. Suddenly she came round the buttress of the bluff into the bright lights of the levee.

She saw the *Amy J.* moored close ashore. Her tall smokestacks were streaming with smoke. Red lanterns were hung here and there. The gang-planks slanting to the levee were filled with processions of big ants laden with barrels and boxes from the diminishing heaps on the ground. The black roustabouts were hustling back and forth, singing and grunting.

The first mate was busy among them with harsh curses and gestures and blows. From the upper deck came a mellow voice, big with authority:

"Handsomely, there—handsomely, now! We got to git off right soon!"

It was her captain's voice. He stood on the head

of his mighty ship, commanding it as a mahout controls an elephant.

Milly stood and watched him with a distant adoration.

The mountain of bales and barrels was vanishing. She wanted to call to him good-by and warn him against the jealous river. But she could not find a sound in her throat. Yet she drew nearer and nearer, unwittingly. And at last he saw her in the glare of the arc lamps. He shaded his eyes with his hands. He started to call to her, but turned back on his deck and disappeared.

He was angry with her. And with reason enough. She turned away, rejected indeed.

She heard big feet on the rough cobbles. A voice followed her.

"Is that you, Milly?"

She paused till he came up.

"What you doin' down here?"

"I don't know," she mumbled, humbly.

He considered her a moment. Then his habit of command took hold of him.

"I know," he said. "You came down here to go along with me."

"Did I?" she whimpered, not daring to contradict so potent a man.

"You bet you did! And you're just in time." He had her little, thin arm in his big, fat hand, and he was carrying her forward in a policeman way when she protested:

"But I didn't bring any clothes or anything."

"Get plenty of clothes up the river. And I'll buy 'em for you—the kind of clothes, too, you ought to have. I guess you won't miss what you're leavin'

behind when you see what I'll fit you out in, you God-blessed little pitiful angel, you!"

He led her up the gangplank among the last of the deck hands. They were in such a hurry they had no time to notice the captain's prisoner.

Milly yielded because she had no strength to fight. Anybody could have carried her off. She thought it was a lucky thing that it happened to be the captain.

He led her through the cargo, up a flight of narrow steps, out on the upper deck and into a cabin.

"Make yourself at home, Milly. It ain't what you ought to have, but you can fix it up to suit you to-morrow. I got to leave you now and cast off, and I'll be mighty busy all night. Me and the old river have been fightin' each other my whole life. Old Mr. Mississip is all right if you watch him. I know every durned dimple in the current. So you needn't worry. I'll see you in the mornin'. Good night, honey. It's the goodest night I ever saw. Do you mind, honey?"

He had kissed her on the forehead. It was like a seal of possession and protection.

She sank down in his big chair and looked about the room, at his table, his papers, his washstand, his bunk. Funny things, men! She saw a lot of changes she could make to improve this room for him, to make it livable and worthy of him.

She had forgotten herself already; and that is the supreme blessing.

She heard loud cries outside, the captain's voice hushing all the others.

"Stop that cussin'! There's a lady aboard!"

She heard the racket of the gangplanks coming in, the ting-a-ling of a bell in the engine room. She felt

the current take the boat, and her old fear eddied round her heart. But the heart of the steamer took up its pulse. The paddles spanked the water into submission.

The steamer forged forward and outward from shore. Through the window she could see the town lights shifting backward. In spite of all the Mississippi could do, the old boat went right ahead. It was a divine victory. And the soul river had not drowned her. She was to be one of those who would build a home by that stream. She had been saved from drowning in either flood; she was divinely lucky.

After a while she peeped out of the door. No one was about. She went to the side deck and watched the water. The current seemed doubly swift with the counter progress of the boat. The current fought, resisted, then went on down the river in vain surrender.

She climbed another flight of steps and came out on the open upper deck into the sky. A strange man was in the little temple of the pilot house—a forward-staring man, turning the big wheel this way and that. And the boat obeyed him.

And he obeyed the captain. She could hear the captain telling him what to do.

And he did it.

She found a place to sit abaft the pilot house. Above her the smokestacks towered. From their heights streamed one long black mantilla that touched the water far back of the steamer, back of the big waves that poured from the hidden wheels in their circular cages and joined to form a rolling wake of huge, smooth billows.

The moon was dazzling. It swept the billows with brushes of silver as fast as the night absorbed them.

The town fell away into the gloom. The well-ordered stars and the placid moon and the radiant prairie of the waters made a paradise.

The captain's voice, calling to the pilot, was the best thing in that paradise. The river was a mighty river, but it had found its master. And so had she found hers.

V

INNOCENCE

I

ROUND and round the May pole the little girls danced, smiling, laughing, panting with joy—girls with their hair flying, their white skirts flicking their white stockings, their white-shod feet spurning the greensward. A brass band under a tree added music to the other graces.

Round and round the little girls danced, flaunting their left hands, holding their right hands high where they clutched the ribbon spokes of the wheel they made. Round and round they wove and unwove the pattern of the dance, twined and intertwined their scallopy paths, braiding their orbits in a plaited garland of delight.

Whittemore, who had arrived just in time to witness the festival, said:

"Good Lord! I'm glad I didn't miss this! It's enough to turn a town cynic into a human being again."

He had been invited to the country house of the Robys, whose daughter's portrait he was painting. He was painting her for money and he hated the job, because Miss Candace Roby seemed to him to know too much. She was the very symbol of the notorious influence of riches on character.

He was tired out with city ways and people, and he hungered for the fresh, sweet countryside.

Mrs. Roby had said something indistinct about exercises somewhere at some school. Whittemore promised himself that he would escape this also. But when his train deposited him on the village platform, he found Mrs. Roby herself awaiting him with a motorload of guests.

Mrs. Roby murmured something about having to go right over for a while to the exercises, because she was on the board of managers or something; but as the others were all talking at once, Whittemore did not catch the details. They turned into a well-groomed estate and stopped among a throng of parked automobiles, most of them glossily expensive.

Everybody got out and walked talkingly across a fine lawn in a quadrangle of handsome buildings. Benches in the shade were occupied by fashionable people, such as the fathers and mothers of fashionable girls'-school girls would be.

The May-pole dance was in full swirl as Whittemore came up, and his artist's eye was captivated by the picture effect. It was a painting of swiftly shifting beauties, a living frieze, as if the Parthenonian nymphs had come to life and set to prancing to music.

The gay postures of the girls; their limber lines; their sinuous curvetings; the magic co-ordination that turned the arm this way when the head went that, inclined the shoulder as the knee was bent; the fascinating swirls of their draperies and ribbons; the sweeping strokes the wrinkles drew each instant and each instant erased; the blur of fleeting color

as this pale hoyden with the red hair was driven round the circle by that russet maiden with the black pennant, and she by the gold-skinned damsel with the auburn tresses, and she by the rosy virgin with the yellow fleece, and so on till the red-haired hoyden came into view again and vanished again—all these things held the painter spellbound.

It was hypnotizing, too, to watch the shuttle of character; for each girl carried round the ring a soul that was unlike every other soul and flashed its distinct identity for a moment.

The guileless rapture of the dance renewed Whittemore's lost illusions. It was good to be here where good little girls romped and skylarked so prettily. Their hearts were fresh crystal vessels newly come from the hand of the glassblower of souls. Life had not yet poured into them its vinegar.

"Innocence! Innocence!" he sighed to himself.

He was startled out of his reverie by Mrs. Roby's voice.

"I want to present you to Miss Haley, the wonderful woman who is in charge of all these souls."

He turned and bowed and shook hands with a woman whose grip showed the same power as her eyes. They were kindly, but they did not strike him as poetic. She accepted his compliments for the May-pole dance without excitement. She looked as if she had given up getting excited.

The band finished its tune. The dance ended, the girls stopped short, breathing hard and tossing their heads like ponies after a race. Their shining eyes had the same self-conscious embarrassment of successful race horses.

Mrs. Roby wandered off to shepherd her other guests, and Miss Haley said, with idle courtesy:

"Your first visit here, Mr. Whittemore?"

"Yes, my first. Great privilege, too. And a great privilege for you to have all this beautiful family, eh?"

"Oh yes. The responsibility is a trifle heavy, but —I like it."

"You must be mighty good to them. They seem so happy. It will be a pity to turn them all out into the world."

Miss Haley's comment puzzled him.

"Perhaps; but they wouldn't think so, I'm afraid. It was hard enough to get them in."

"Oh, children always cry when they leave home first."

"'Always'?" Miss Haley asked, incredulously.

"I don't mean the runaways, but I mean tender little things like those. They're as pink and downy as peaches still clinging to the tree. It makes my heart ache to think of what the world will do to them."

"But think what they will do to the world," said Miss Haley.

There was a subacid bite in her voice that made Whittemore wince. This was no time or place for satire. But he had to be polite.

"Of course," he conceded, "some of these girls may turn out bad after the world has spoiled them, but it won't be their fault. All the more reason for being glad to get a glimpse of them before they open their eyes and lose their innocence."

"'Innocence'?" said Miss Haley.

The woman was becoming a nuisance, a sarcastic echo. She patronized him abominably.

"They're so versatile in their innocence, those children," he said. "Such different ways of being unstained. I don't go in much for the sort of sentimental painting they make into chromos and calendars and guest-room allegories. But I'm so sick of doing the portraits of bored and boring society girls who know it all that I'd just dote on putting some of these little angels of yours on canvas. It's hopeless, I suppose, to think of it."

Miss Haley amazed him by acceding to his mood.

"Perhaps not. We're always glad to have our girls do anything they can to make a little money—decently."

This commercial suggestion followed by the word "decently" jolted Whittemore like a double blow. He gasped.

"You don't mean that you'd let me paint them and pay them?"

"Why not? It's honest money, isn't it?"

"Of course, but—but—you mean that I might really get that big-eyed one there for a model?"

"I don't see why not."

"You're not afraid of me?"

"Not if you're not afraid of her," said Miss Haley, reverting to her bewildering manner. "I was thinking that the little darling might steal something from you or do something to get you or herself into trouble with the police."

Whittemore began to wonder if he had wandered into an insane asylum by mistake, on a field day of the lunatics. If so, Miss Haley was the wildest witted of all.

"Perhaps you're a little overfed on girlish innocence," Whittemore ventured, "with so much of it

about you. I suppose everything gets tiresome in excess—even innocence."

"'Innocence'! We seem to be at cross-purposes somewhere."

"I don't know much about girls, but I think I can tell innocence when I see it. I'd love to immortalize that particular little saint over against the tree."

"But where do you think you are?"

"I didn't catch the name of the school when Mrs. Roby told me."

"This is the Northforth Reform School. Most of these girls are here because their parents or the police found them absolutely incorrigible, vicious, and corrupt."

There was something paralyzing about this, as if Miss Haley had planted a hammer on the very solar plexus of Whittemore's mind.

"You really mean that all those girls are bad?"

Miss Haley saw how she had punished him. She tried to help him.

"I don't blame you for being fooled by the little darlings. They'd fool anybody. They fool me constantly. As for their really being bad or good, that gets us into pretty deep water for discussion on a busy day. Every one of these girls has her good points. They have to have, for nobody is all bad. But as for innocence, if there is any wickedness they don't know, it must have been invented recently, and they'd just love to be told about it."

Whittemore was staggered mentally, physically, spiritually. He asked permission to sit down.

The other exercises went on regardless of his moral earthquake. From one of the buildings a long procession wound, made up of older prisoners in a string

of human beads of all colors, including many negresses. The band played a march. Most of the women had selected men's costumes of one sort or another, Miss Haley evidently believing that they had long since passed the point where any harm could be done them by such a masquerade.

Having been enlightened as to the personnel of the institution, Whittemore saw in the women what he now expected, but he was amazed to see how average they were. Some of them were handsome, but most of them were not.

Another theory was knocked overboard—the ancient and beloved delusion that beautiful women make up the ranks of wickedness. Some of the fiercest of these ex-priestesses of evil were ugly, ungainly, and forbidding; many of them looked like respectable members of churches, farmers' wives and daughters, substantial village housewives. And many of them would no doubt have led humdrum lives but for some accidental encounter with a switchman who shunted them off the main line, or with some broken rail or wheel that wrecked them utterly.

The older girls marched on and on. Whittemore was not attracted by their costumes—they were merely burlesques as policemen, firemen, baseball players, soldiers, sailors—altogether too hippy and busty and fat at the knee.

Each of them must have had a marvelous soul, and a history that would have been precious to an understanding inquirer, but Whittemore found them all too inartistic to win his concern.

He was sick at heart. He turned his eyes from the long, slow parade to the cluster of nymphs still

drooping about the idle May pole. "Nymphs" was a better word for them than he realized, for they had just about the morality a nymph would have if she had an existence to be moral or immoral with.

The girls were distributed in careless attitudes, watching the parade and thinking themselves unwatched. Some leaned against the pole; a few hung on one another's shoulders in groups of two or three; the rest had dropped to the ground and crouched, or sat hugging their knees, or reclined, supporting their little chins on the palms of their hands.

The sunlight loved them. The breeze blessed their hair and their gently fluttered ribbons and frocks. They laughed or mused or scowled at the sun.

The big-eyed one that Whittemore had singled out for his most distinguished admiration sauntered across the grass with girlish gracelessness, yet with the helpless grace of a kitten. She was so lithe that her bones seemed to be made of willow. Her huge eyes wandered aimlessly, reveling in light and color, looking for no admiration and forgetting that she was woman. Her mouth was full and kissable as a baby's, and as free of any thought of kissing. Her cheek, her brow, her throat, were all virgin—a white vellum on which time had written nothing at all.

She turned her eyes toward Whittemore as she neared him, without seeing him or, at least, without detaching him from the other spectators. He studied her in an anguish of examination, trying to find a hint of her record or of the expert hypocrisy that could give a little criminal the mien of a seraph.

He found no faintest sign—not so much of a wrinkle as a snowbird's feet leave in the snow.

He could only believe that Miss Haley had slan-

dered her, or that some one had borne false witness against her and sent her here. Her beauty was as purifying as it was pure. It inspired a feeling of fatherliness, of piety, of prayer, of an Easter lily with sacred dew sweet upon it.

Whittemore felt holy words stirring within him. He longed to give that sanctified image to the world and to posterity, for an emblem to live toward. He returned to Miss Haley's offer to let her pose for him. It became a pious duty to fix that face on canvas before life could mar it.

He asked, anxiously, "You were serious when you offered to let me paint this child?"

"Perfectly. How do you mean to pose her? You weren't thinking of—of—"

"Oh no! I want her just as she is now—as the May-pole girl. I don't want to paint pretty flesh; I want to get that inspiring soul on canvas. I'll come up here and paint her if I may."

"Very well. I'll give you a room at any time." Miss Haley lifted her finger a little and focused her voice. "Nadine!"

The girl jumped like a commanded soldier and came forward.

"Is her name Nadine, really?" said Whittemore.

"She probably took it from a movie," said Miss Haley.

Whittemore felt a stage fright, and Nadine was plainly a little frightened, too. But perhaps she was afraid of Miss Haley. Whittemore was afraid of Nadine. Miss Haley said:

"Nadine, I want to introduce you to Mr. Whittemore."

"Pleased to meet you," said Nadine, in a voice

as shy and limpid as a brook's lurking in the leaves.

Whittemore put out his hand and received hers—a soft, cool hand, as unemotional as a bouquet. It gave his no pressure, and he let it go.

He felt a curious terror of the child. She was so impossible, so incompatible with her reputation. He was ready to be her champion against the foul traducer or the jealous fiend who had denounced her. She stood looking off at the strolling visitors till Whittemore spoke.

"I've been watching you dance, and I want to compliment you."

Nadine's big eyes went first to Miss Haley as if for confirmation of what she had heard, then for permission to look at Whittemore. Then they rolled his way. There was an effect of moonrise in them, moonrise on a still pool. She said, with diffidence:

"Thank you, sir. I am glad that you liked our dance. We have all enjoyed our exercises very much. Miss Haley is very kind to allow us to have them. Do you not think so?"

She spoke it like a little girl making up a composition for her teacher. The articulation of every syllable was labored and unnatural. But this only proved her innocence the more. Whittemore wanted to hug her as one clenches a baby that has recited its "Now I lay me down to sleep."

A doll had spoken. There was no passion or guilt or knowledge in her manner toward this avowed admirer. Surely, if she were what Miss Haley said she was, she would have begun to ply her fascinations by now.

Miss Haley said:

"Mr. Whittemore is an artist, Nadine." The eyes widened farther, politely. "He would like to paint your picture." The eyes softened and warmed with a very human note. She was too innocent to conceal her pride. Miss Haley went on, "He is willing to pay you for your time."

The eyes narrowed decidedly, and twinkled, as a child's would, at the proffer of money to spend. She had doubtless known poverty. If she had gone wrong, it was for poverty. Whittemore had read many romances of sin—and no statistics.

Nadine spoke.

"Whatever you wish, Miss Haley, I will do, and do gladly."

An appointment was made. She gave Whittemore a little warm hand. There was a grateful friendliness in the timid clasp.

"That's all, Nadine," said Miss Haley.

"Thank you, Miss Haley. Good-by, sir." Nadine bowed and skipped away to her companions. Whittemore saw that she was publishing her great news. He was glad that she was proud.

"Would you like to know just what brought her here?" Miss Haley murmured, teasingly.

"I'd like to, but I—I think I'd rather wait till after the picture is finished. I don't want to throw any rocks in the mirror."

Miss Haley smiled.

"It's strange how people love their illusions. As for me, I always want to know the facts."

"Perhaps Nadine will tell me the facts," said Whittemore.

"Perhaps," laughed Miss Haley.

She was a most disconcerting woman. Whitte-

more was already set against her. He held a brief for poor Nadine, condemned to false imprisonment and false suspicion.

Mrs. Roby came up, and Whittemore dared not tell her of his plan.

He was afraid of being laughed at. But he had a new interest in life. He had adopted a child.

II

In the motor, and at the Roby house round the tea tables, there was much talk of Miss Haley and her strange community. It had been astounding to see hundreds of branded women gathered in one flock.

There was some rather frank talk of the girls. Mrs. Roby and her guests suffered no false modesties to restrain their speech.

Mr. Gammell, the banker, made the typically American comment:

"Undoubtedly the vast majority of them are foreigners. That's why I'm against this unrestricted immigration."

"Yes; it's very dangerous—for the foreigners," said Mr. Roby, who was a patriot, but not a fanatic. "Miss Haley was giving us some statistics. They show that— Where is that book? Here it is.

"Out of a total of two hundred and twenty-six, fifty are foreign born and a hundred and seventy-six American, counting forty-four colored Magdalens. So we'll have to admit that America is still supreme in all things.

"Here's some other odd facts about parents: 'Both parents born in America, forty; both parents

English, none; both parents French, one; German, seventeen; Irish, eighteen; Italian, eight; Russian, twenty-four.'

"'Previous occupation: chambermaid, one; dressmaker, nine; in a factory, sixty-six; general housework, seventy-eight; laundry, eight; manicure, two; nurse girl, two; saleswoman, four; stenographer, two; theatrical, two; waitress, twelve; worker on ostrich feathers, four.'

"That's about the most dramatic table of statistics I ever read," said Mr. Roby. "Rather disturbing light on the influence of home environment. General housework seems to be the most effective means of driving women to the streets."

"Well, I don't wonder," said his wife. "But you'll spoil our dinner. The bell for going up to dress has rung."

The women scurried off at this, but the men lingered. They were disinclined to flippancy and also a trifle awed by the subject.

"What in God's world could lead a woman to such a life?" Whittemore groaned.

Roby answered, promptly:

"I've got the dope on that, too, and it's pretty important."

He spread out the cold-blooded census on the big living-room table.

The men read with eager curiosity, pausing to comment on many of the items in the inventory of the reasons that led the women they had seen to the lives the law had wrenched them from.

A—In connection with her family

1 Immorality of the parents..... 15
2 Incompatibility..... 39

3 Neglect and abuse	26
4 No mother or father, or neither	166
5 Overindulgence	10
6 Overstrictness	35
7 Poverty	9
8 Turned out	6

B—In connection with married life

1 Death of husband	5
2 Desertion by husband	8
3 Immorality (includes cruelty or criminality)	14
4 Incompatibility	26
5 Husband put wife on street	2

C—Personal reasons

1 Bad company	75
2 No sex instruction	10
3 Idle or lonely	5
4 Sick; needed the money	4
5 Ruined anyway	10
6 Lover put girl on street	10
7 Previous use of drink or drugs	7
8 Tired of drudgery	4
9 White slaves	2
10 "Easy money"	17
11 Dances	13
12 Lazy; hated work	20
13 Stage environment	9
14 Love of the life	15
15 Desertion by lover	13
16 Desire for pleasure (theater, food, clothes)	48
17 Desire for money	38
18 Ashamed to go home after first escapade	1

D—Economic reasons

1 Can't support herself	5
2 Can't support herself and children	1
3 Couldn't find work	13
Total	671

Roby alone was not dazed by this catalog of motives. He was familiar with it. He preached on it.

"You'll notice that, out of these six hundred and seventy-one girls, only fifteen say they followed the 'life' because they liked it. Only one in forty admits it. There must be a lot of hypocrites among them. Do you know, I've heard—you've all heard—every reason on earth given for sin except the real one. There's one reason that gets everybody—and everybody knows it—and yet in all the stories and articles and sermons and discussions I've never seen it even mentioned, to say nothing of seeing it used as a basis of argument."

"What is the mysterious secret?"

"What those fifteen girls confessed. They lived it because they liked it. That's why all people sin. It's so damned delightful. But did you ever see it frankly stated as a basis for any study of a remedy?"

It struck them all as one of those amazing novelties that familiar, unspoken things look to be, when coldly stated.

"Funny, isn't it," said Roby, "how afraid we all are of the truth, the true truth, the only thing that can make us free, and the only thing we can't get free from? We're all alike—"

The butler approached him and murmured:

"Beg pardon, sir, but Mrs. Roby says you'd better be getting dressed, sir."

Roby sighed with a mock subordination that was not altogether parody, and went to his room. The other men hastened to theirs. Whittemore hung back a moment, then took the book with him upstairs.

He read it as he dressed, and found it more thrilling than any other mystery story. He wondered what excuse Nadine would have given if she had been really guilty.

III

The following week Whittemore went up to Northforth by train and called on Miss Haley. He carried with him his brushes, palette, and tubes, and a canvas as unsullied as Nadine's cheek.

Miss Haley sent for the girl. Nadine had been working in the field, and she came in looking, perhaps, more than ever childish in her overalls and her floppy straw hat. Miss Haley sent her to put on her Maypole dress.

She came back with her white dress on, her white stockings and shoes. Her hair was down, and in it a pink ribbon was knotted.

She was self-conscious, stiff, and scared. Making her strike and hold the pose she had taken so naturally in the dance was as hard as making a dog sit up. She became awkward for the first time in mind and body. This only confirmed Whittemore's opinion of her innocence.

Miss Haley left him alone with her when he had finally arranged her with her right hand high, her left hand swung off in balance, and her body turned in a posture of arrested motion. As he sketched in the selected attitude he said:

"Tell me all about yourself, Nadine."

[If young girls could tell and would tell all about themselves and what is truly in their hearts, at this bewildering season, when spring adolesces into summer, what documents we should have! There is no

more important period of human life, and none in which the records are more sparse. Women will not write, and men dare not. A few horrifying medical or pathological treatises by erotomaniacal old physicians are nearly all we have. The fictionist who ventured to portray the soul as it is in that novitiate would probably be lynched by acclamation. The most dramatic and terrible of all fields is fenced off from exploitation, though everybody knows more or less what grows there, while ferociously denying the truth. These things must not be printed lest the young girls should find out what they know already!

[The editor of one family paper gave a scared glance or two on one occasion in an effort to persuade mothers to tell their daughters what they must else find out in the worst of ways. One mother wrote him she had tried again and again to muster up the courage to break the hateful news to her little girl, but every time she did, one glance into the great, pure eyes of the child made the truth too horrible to deliver.

[The editor added a note. By an odd coincidence two women who conducted a school for little girls had written him that this very little girl was so vicious in her precocious depravities and had spread such corruption among the other pupils that they had about decided to disband the school in despair.]

Whittemore felt like that innocent mother when Nadine swept her large eyes his way. He regretted his question as soon as he had uttered it. He had broached a forbidden theme. But Nadine only smiled sadly, and said:

"I don't like to talk about myself, sir. I have led a very stupid life. My darling mother died, and my

father married again. She was a very bad woman and terribly jealous of me. She drove me out into the street and then accused me of—oh, such terrible things! She wanted to get me out of reach of my poor father, so she went to a judge and told him—oh, such stories! And he sent me here. I begged not to be sent, but what could I do? I had no friends."

A tear, as big a tear as only such big eyes could utter, was expressed on her long lashes; it welled across them and down her cheek.

Whittemore's heart ached, and he cried out before he could check himself:

"I knew it! Poor little thing!"

The pitiful gratitude of her look was reward enough, but he determined to secure her release as soon as he could learn the facts and swing the necessary influence.

He decided to complete the work while the affiation was in him, and he took a room at the village hotel, carefully avoiding the station, lest the Robys catch him at his task.

The next morning he began betimes. Nadine knew him well enough now to ask him questions. She wanted to know all about him and his life in Paris, and just where and how he lived in New York. He told her what he thought her old enough to know, giving himself, if not her, the impression that much of his life was not to be vouchsafed to ears as young as hers.

One day Miss Haley invited him to have lunch at her table, and he told her how candid and clear he found Nadine's heart.

Miss Haley smiled at him, but without her earlier condescension.

"You said Nadine was innocent, and I rather made fun of your own innocence. I was wrong. Nadine is innocent."

"Aha!" said Whittemore, triumphant, less for his own sake than for the girl's.

"But," Miss Haley amended, "I doubt if we have the same idea of innocence. You don't want me to tell you her story, because it might spoil your picture."

"I shouldn't mind now, because Nadine told me her story herself."

Miss Haley smiled indulgently.

"Very well; let it go at that—till your painting is done. But I want to explain what I really feel.

"Living here all the time, seeing so many people sent here and kept here till they are paroled and then brought back for breaking their pledges, or being released as apparently reformed, I get cynical sometimes. At other times I am very fond of all my children. I love them and forgive them as one forgives a naughty infant that has broken something without meaning to.

"These girls here are most of them undeveloped children. Their bodies have grown up, but their minds have stopped short. They are old infants.

"Now, children are very different things from what Wordsworth says of them in his 'Ode on the Intimations of Immortality.' They do not come into the world fresh from heaven, as a rule, but rather from the other place. They are natural-born devils, and they have to be broken of nearly all their natural inclinations.

"Children are just like pups or kittens. They have no morals. They lie and steal and misbehave

generally, because they don't know the rules of life. Parents have to teach them not to kill and torture and deceive. They don't know what modesty is. They would be worse than they are if they knew how. Slowly and wearily their parents teach them, by punishments or scoldings or rewards, that they must not do this, that, and the other thing.

"Some learn quickly and believe all they are told. Some only pretend to believe, so as not to worry their beloved parents or so as to be let alone. They are little skeptics of the whole human book of morals.

"They're not exactly hypocrites—unless you'd say that a chameleon is a hypocrite for suiting his color to his situation. We talk a lot about good and evil, but I sometimes wonder if they are any more than colors that match or jar with the general color scheme in fashion. You know the story of the chameleon that wandered on to the Scotch plaid and 'just naturally burst himself.' Well, some of these poor girls are here because they have found the pattern of life entirely too complicated to conform to. And they went broke morally.

"Anything that interests them is theirs if nobody is watching. Anything they feel a mood to do is the right thing to do if it is safe. Their moods drive them. They will try everything once, as the saying is. They simply make a choice of temptations. Deceiving troublesome guardians is all part of the gift of nature. It comes as easy to them as playing dead does to a 'possum.

"That is why some of them keep innocent eyes and their shy, pretty ways. They are really innocent—but innocent of morality and honesty and decency. They are not troubled by remorse or

vicarious suffering or any of the anxieties that make wrinkles and narrow eyes.

"When I see one of those peculiarly guileless-looking girls come before me, I always say: 'Here is one who is as bad as they make 'em. I've got nothing to appeal to except her whims and appetites.'

"Of all the girls I've had, your May-pole girl is the hardest to reach. She's everybody's pet, but I wouldn't trust one of her sort, or believe one of them. Nor would I seriously blame one of them for anything she did. And now you know my idea of innocence."

Whittemore hurried out to his post. Nadine joined him there. The clouds kept aloof, prowling round the edges of the sky, as if Whittemore's hostile glances frightened them off.

He was in the vein; his brushes flew, and he painted on and on, far past his train hour, finishing the picture in a grand burst of enthusiasm just in time to catch a late-afternoon local to town.

When he bade Nadine good-by he held her hand a long, earnest while till she let it go herself to study her portrait. She stared into the canvas with the wonderment of a dryad musing upon a brook mirror; and her delight in the manifest beauty was fascinating.

Whittemore told her that he would see her again and take up her case at once. He guaranteed her a speedy release, thanked her with extravagant gratitude, and fled.

IV

The next day a pile of neglected correspondence, a nagging telephone, and a succession of callers kept

him occupied. He showed the Nadine picture to his visitors, and their praises were almost unanimous, although a cantankerous critic or two complained that the picture was sickish sweet and stickily sentimental.

Whittemore defended rather Nadine than her image, and ridiculed the critical fallacy that it is more artistic to paint homely old men or morbid forests or fantastic distortions of nature than to picture exquisite girl-beauty crescent toward full-moonhood.

The next day was full of appointments with sitters, among them the know-it-all Miss Roby, with her sporty talk, and a priggish old lady or two full of charitable schemes.

He found a dinner date on his calendar and dared not break it. But he escaped early and returned to his studio. He wanted to study his painting of Nadine. He propped the canvas on an easel and sat off, considering his work and finding it good. The more he admired it, the more he admired Nadine. He felt proud to be privileged not only to immortalize her innocence, but, later, to vindicate it.

He decided to begin his crusade for her restoration to liberty early in the morning. As he yawned with satisfaction over his art and his philanthropy—or, perhaps, his philogyny—there was a knock at his door.

He had a door bell, and the neglect to ring it gave him an instant impression that his caller was not sophisticated. The knock was repeated, and it suggested the soft knuckles of a plump-handed, frightened child. He called, "Come in!" and the door opened slowly, as if anxiously, reluctantly, with deprecation.

In slipped Nadine and closed the door back of her timidly. The click of the lock startled her. Whittemore was startled, too. He gasped:

"How did you get here?"

"Miss Haley said I might come, sir."

"But surely not at this hour."

"My train was late, please."

"But why did you come to me?"

"Because you were so kind, and I—I need a friend. I have no home."

Young as she was, she was old enough to be endangered and to endanger. Whittemore, unutterably uncomfortable, said:

"But you can't stay here with me."

"Why not?"

He could not decide whether this were pure ignorance or pure impudence. He assumed the former.

"Aren't you old enough to know that you must not?"

She giggled like a mischievous child or a shrewd witch. Whittemore was sane enough to see trouble afar and run from it without delay. He grew stern.

"Out you go!"

She tried persuasion, wheedling, wild prayer. She kissed his hand and stroked his cheek imploringly. He ran, like a Joseph, to an anachronistic telephone.

"What are you going to do?" she cried.

"Telephone for a car and take you back to where you ran away from."

"I won't go with you."

"Then I'll keep you here till they come for you."

He pounded the telephone hook, impatiently calling, "Hello! Hello!" to a telephone boy who was also elevator boy at this hour.

There was a rush, the slam of a door. Nadine was gone. Whittemore was about to drop the telephone and pursue her, when he heard a voice at his ear.

"Hello!" he shouted. "Is this the hall man?"

"Yassa."

"This is Mr. Whittemore. A young girl has just been here."

"Yassa. I brang her up."

"Well, she's run away, and I want you to keep her from getting out. Close the door and keep her in at all costs. I'm coming right down."

"Yassa."

Whittemore left the telephone and ran from his studio. He ran down the winding stairs, eight flights, growing more angry and alarmed at every jog. When he reached the main floor he found the hall boy with his back against the outer door.

"She 'ain't come yet," he said.

Whittemore was disgusted with the situation; but he had hopelessly compromised himself and he was determined to go through with it.

He called the superintendent up from the basement.

They made a slow and tiresome search of the roof and the unfurnished or uninhabited flats. Strange objects jumped at them as they flashed the light in the gloom, but there was no Nadine.

Whittemore next insisted on calling up the occupied apartments, one by one. He disturbed several bridge games and some slumbers. His question was answered in the negative, with unanimous coldness or anger.

Baffled at every turn, Whittemore bribed the hall man and the superintendent to keep a close watch

for the night, and went back to his studio. Then he called up Miss Haley and told her of Nadine's incursion. Miss Haley said:

"We missed her. We have searching parties in the roads and woods about here now. She didn't go by train. She probably met some automobile and told the driver a good lie. She lies beautifully. She has such an innocent— But you know that already. I'll notify the police—"

On the second night, at about two o'clock, the hall man woke from what he called a light nap with an impression that some one had tiptoed past him. He felt a draught.

The door was open. He looked up and down the street, but saw no one. He assumed that the door had opened of itself and went back to his meditations on whatever he meditated on.

The next morning a great hullabaloo was raised by Mr. Belshaw, an elderly artist who designed stained-glass memorial windows. He notified the superintendent and also the police that a model posing for one of his saints had stolen away with a pocketbook full of money and some antique carved beads of great value.

A detective named Yore arrived with unexpected promptness, due, no doubt, to the violence of Mr. Belshaw's wrath.

He gave Mr. Belshaw a very nasty look and invited him to spill out all the facts. Belshaw nearly blushed as he explained:

"The other evening I was sitting here working on a cartoon for a church window, and the door was on the catch, as I expected a friend to call. And—well—all of a sudden—in bolts this girl and begs me to

save her. She had run away from home because they beat her, and—well—"

"And you fell for that?" the detective sneered.

"Anybody would fall for eyes like hers. Look at 'em. I've put 'em in a cartoon. She posed for this martyr. Wouldn't you trust a face like that?"

"Nagh! I don't trust anybody. And if we don't nab that girl, I wouldn't make much of a holler if I was you. Your story won't look none too good in the court. You kept her here, and it ain't your fault you didn't learn her as much as you thought you did. You better pocket your loss and keep out of the papers."

The detective left Mr. Belshaw to simmer in his own broth, and went to consult Whittemore.

Whittemore made one more battle for Nadine. He told, with some difficulty in the face of Yore's sarcastic grin, the story of Nadine's false incarceration as a result of her stepmother's cruelty. Yore laughed.

"Stepmother—hell! She never had one."

"How do you know that?"

"Why, I've known that kid since she was born. I knew her on the sidewalks of the East Side. Usedn't I to see her trundlin' her little brother in a baby carriage? Wasn't I raised in the same block? Maggie was a hell-kitten from the start."

"'Maggie'? I'm speaking of Nadine."

"Nadine nothin'! She got that out of a theayter program. 'Mag' was what they christened her, and her old man and woman as nice, honest people as you'd want to know. They done everything for that girl, from prayin' over her to bustin' bedslats over her. The priest, the settlement workers, the

teachers, the Sallavation Army—everybody took a whack at savin' Maggie's soul. But nothin' doin'. Or, I should say, everything doin'. I 'ain't got the nerve to tell you some of her stunts.

"Her poor ma and pa put her out to work to keep her off the streets. She got fired regular. Nobody wanted to prosecute her because they couldn't face them goo-goo eyes. They tried her in a home—a good woman gave her a chance as a maid, and what did she do but put roach powder in the milk because she was jealous of the dairyman and the cook.

"I was on the force by that time, and I was called in on the case. Same old story. Mag—or Nadine, as you call her—spilled a few tears and it was all off. The cook cried, and the nice old lady cried, and wouldn't appear against her.

"She wouldn't go to school except off and on when she admired the teacher. Once, when the truant officer got after her, she said she had started to school, but had been grabbed and bound to a stake by a gang of men after a terrible fight for her honor. It was a swell story, but we couldn't find the stake where she said it was. She named the men, though, and tried to get 'em sent to the electric chair—just for fun. She's got a great little sense of humor.

"I 'ain't got time to tell you all the things that little lady's been up to. She made the Foundlin' Asylum a nice little present as soon as she could. Later she gets one young feller so crazy about her that, when she has a hunch to go to a movie and he can't borry the price off anybody, he goes into a saloon to hold up a barkeep. The barkeep went for him with a bung starter, and the poor fish shoots him—croaks

the barkeep, too. It was me was goin' by and heard the shot. I stepped in just as the lad steps over the barkeep's body and taps the 'No Sale' bar on the cash register. I says:

"'Well, well, son, what's up?' And he up and tries to plug me. The slug rips a swell painting, and I had to beat him insenseless before I could take his gun off him. He's been sentenced to the chair a'ready, but he's got his case up on appeal.

"We tried to link up little Nadine with this job, but the young feller swore she wasn't in on his raid, and she denied she'd ever sor him.

"She didn't waste no time pinin' for him after he went up the river, either, but she joined up with a gang of phony check passers. And then we got her cold.

"But she on'y hadda flash them lamps of hers on His Honor once, and he wouldn't listen to me. I wanted her put away so's to give her poor ma a vacation, but the best the judge would hand her was the reformatory, where she could be removed from evil surroundin's and have lovin' care.

"She ain't in the reformatory a week before she's writin' letters to the papers tellin' how cruel she's treated, chained up, and starved and whipped. They started an investigation and the managers of the inst'tootion was treated like they was worse 'n the inmates, but it blew over, and Maggie she settled down for a while.

"I was just wonderin' if she wasn't about due for another little raid on New York. Old Belshaw's lucky she was satisfied to skip with his roll. I'd have looked for her to blackmail him.

"That's her picture, ain't it? It don't look so

much unlike her at that. She's a pirty thing, ain't she? I'll say she is. And you can't help likin' her. She's got a bone out of joint in her head, maybe, or somethin' like that, prob'ly. Good day."

When the garrulous familiar of criminals at work had gone, Whittemore took the picture of Nadine from the easel pins and turned it to the wall. He was very bitter against her for adding him to the throng she had been fooling so perfectly.

One day he bought some old things at an auction. Among them an exquisite little spinet. It was so nearly playable that he called in a piano tuner.

But after a little trial the tuner resigned.

"The wrest pins won't hold up under the strain. They keep slipping. You'll have to give it up as far as music is concerned. You'll just have to get your money's worth out of the looks of it. Pretty thing, isn't it?"

Whittemore wondered if Nadine were not a kind of musical instrument whose wrest pins could not stand the tug of the strings. She was full of jingle, too, but hopelessly out of harmony.

Nobody blamed a piano for not staying in tune, or expected it to lift its own strings to the true pitch when professional tuners gave them up. Why should one blame a soul for being badly assembled and always off the key in spite of the fair case and the tempting white keys?

So the spinet stood silent, but Whittemore would often take Nadine's picture from its exile and study it. It tormented him with its baffling beauty and the history of its original. He remembered that old painters used their mistresses as models for their Madonnas. But they had known what they were

about. His own Fornarina had obtained his reverence under false pretenses. He would not offer the picture for sale.

But, one day, a dealer called to see his wares and, looking about among the disjected canvases, came upon the May-pole girl.

"What's this?" he said.

"Oh, just a study."

"I didn't know you went in for these ideal things."

"'Ideal'!" Whittemore groaned.

"I'll take it," said the dealer.

Whittemore felt that this was the best way of ridding himself of the haunt. When a price had been agreed upon the dealer stared at his property and sighed.

"That may be too pretty to be art, but it gets me somehow. I suppose it's because I lost a daughter who looked like this—same pure, innocent expression. Only consolation is she died before she knew what wrong was."

Whittemore had a horrible suspicion, but he kept it to himself. The dealer took the picture with him, and, being a dealer, dealt in it. He sold it to a lithographer, who made a print of it and labeled it "Innocence." It sold even more enormously than "September Morn," because it appealed to a far wider market, to the great public that fears the nude and trusts the sentimental.

On a hundred thousand walls the effigy of Nadine found a shrine. She smiled and gazed down upon millions of people, who gazed up at her and felt better for her sake, trusted her eyes, and trusted life a little more because of her.

Mothers pointed to her as to an ikon and used her

as a text for their daughters to model their souls upon.

Many saintly women of the most useful lives have been encumbered, and have cumbered the day, with faces of the least inspiring sort. Some of the best of them have suggested horses rather than humans. Their hard mouths and hard cheeks, cavernous eyes and scrawly hair, have kept them from the walls of homes. But Nadine became a household saint.

Whittemore had a vast amount of unwelcome advertisement for his picture. The critics ridiculed him for its popularity, and the people revered him for a success he had not intended.

The true influence of the painted Nadine upon the American home would be hard to estimate. Perhaps it served as a vicarious atonement for some of the misdeeds the perverse little genius continued to add to her amazing record.

At the latest reports she was once more a student at Miss Haley's school. Over Miss Haley's desk hangs a print of her most widely circulated pupil. Miss Haley often looks at it. Sometimes she laughs bitterly, and sometimes she sighs tenderly as her lips mutely frame the mystic word, "Innocence!"

VI

THE COLLEGE LORELEI

I

ACCORDING to the red calendar of the maple trees it was autumn. By the college almanac it was spring. Like the soonest bluebirds and the first sown seed, the earliest students were arriving on the campus, fluttering down almost as thick and fast as the reluctant leaves.

The seasons were equally reversed in the heart of the woman whose window—whose almost famous window—overlooked the college yard. That woman and her window had become an institution. The seat she sat in was called the Chair of Platonic Love, and she was dubbed Professor Emerita of Applied Philandery.

The melancholy that visits the usual soul when the ominous cold winds ransack the trees came to her in the later days of June. She drooped at Commencement time, for the summer was the winter of her discontent. It was a period of dull torpor, a sort of hibernation; she and her doleful sisters in the small town suffered estivation, like land snails; merely existed as nullities, while all other life flourished to the full. But now that September was nearly gone she felt spring in the air. And now she smiled on the youngsters trooping along the walks

—smiled a hungry, preying smile, like a cat that purrs luxuriously in the sun and basks, assured and patient.

Her real name was Bertha Lorton and she had never been able to change it, though she had been known by a sort of *nom de collège* as "Lalage" Lorton ever since the time of Douglas Wier, of the class of—well, it was back in the ancient days when Latin was a required study.

At that period the faculty had something to say about the curriculum, and even a man of Wier's notoriously practical nature—he has since achieved wealth as a manufacturer of coal-tar products—was forced to study Horace, to the mutual disgust of himself and Horace.

But, in some manner, Wier had responded to the music of at least two of Horace's most musical lines—possibly because they were extraordinarily easy to translate. To his troubled mind it was as though a grindstone had suddenly turned into a chime of bells. Without looking up a single word in the lexicon or the pony, or a single foot in the prosody, he had understood and delighted in the well-known lilt of

Dulce ridentem Lalagen amabo,
Dulce loquentem.

At that time Wier happened to believe that little Bertha Lorton was the sweet-speakingest and sweet-laughingest thing in the world; so he called her Lalage, and the name stuck. It survived his life in college. Much water had flowed under Arden Bridge since Wier's day, and many a class had passed under the yoke; but here was Miss Lalage Lorton again at her window, the same Lalage save for a

certain crinkle of the petal, still sweet of speech and alert for laughter as of yore—but still Miss Lorton.

This finished summer had been almost intolerable for her. Money had been lacking to take her to seashore or mountain, and the dull town had been like a deserted village. The college was the heart of life, and the heart had stopped. Dormitories, laboratories, recitation buildings, chapel, gymnasium, chapter houses, all were closed, and the boarding houses were but the dreary lairs of tenantless landladies. The grass grew long in the campus, hiding the walks, and in the athletic field and on the tennis courts; there were no games to watch and no celebrations of games, no class hops, no cane rushes, no book bonfires to light up the night, no choruses to sweeten the evening.

All the long, hot, stupid season Miss Lorton had nothing to do but read novels, read other people's love stories, and compare them with the well-stocked library of her own memory. They suffered by comparison, but they all ended with hero and heroine in each other's arms and a parson coming up like a volunteer fireman.

Since the forenoon of her heyday a new generation of girls had grown up to contest for the students. These girls called her an old maid, and those of them whom chance had made brides pitied her for her romanceless life—her, whose heart was an encyclopedia of amorous experience—a lexicon of love—resembling a lexicon in the frequent change of subject and the brevity of the items—but, after all, an almost unabridged dictionary.

Miss Lorton might have made somebody a very

good wife, but this proposition was never brought to a Q. E. D. She had always been about to marry and had never pushed her finger through a ring. That was the one word her vocabulary lacked—"marriage," and she longed to acquire it. Several women she knew, who had never had a tithe of her love affairs, had nevertheless enjoyed two or even three weddings, several motherhoods, one or two widowhoods or separations or divorces—all those postgraduate excitements that she had been denied.

She had rested all summer, had read articles on how to keep young, to become supple, to get attractive, and stay so. She had taken curious exercises, had bought and applied numerous beauty lotions—all of them warranted harmless.

She felt that she was looking young. She wished to look young, and her heart hypnotized her mirror into telling her that she was young.

And in another environment she would have been young. As an actress, a singer, an Amazon in the social war of a city, she would have been just entering into the ripeness of beauty and its management. Compared to Cleopatra or Ninon de Lenclos in their heydey, she was a mere girl. Among men who had grown up with her, or among a mixed society of late-repenting bachelors or relapsing widowers, she would have been in high fettle for the matrimonial stakes.

The trouble was that she had cast her lot in with a college crowd; her clients were all boys. The instructors and professors were out of the running, for the swarm of youths acted as a chaperon. Such members of the faculty as were not already married possessed their souls in patience till vacations set them free to go a-wooing in other towns, where their

own students would not see them and think them ridiculous.

Lalage was entirely surrounded by boys. For them she was growing old. And she was arriving toward the ghastly crisis of confessing it. But not yet! She must have one more season; and here it was.

So she watched the boys saunter by, the unwilling candidates; they passed in review along the sidewalk, not knowing that they were under inspection.

Suddenly her heart thrilled. She did not believe in ghosts, yet what else but a ghost could that be? Surely that was Douglas Wier, of the class of ——. No; she would not believe her memory. Douglas Wier's year of graduation could not have been so far back. It could not be that the first of her passing regiment of lovers had marched out of her life so long ago! That would make her—well, she could hardly call herself a girl and confess to so many years. She must not cease being a girl—not yet. She had refused for so long to think of her age, she had lied so often about it to other people, denied the relentless recurrent testimony of her inevitable birthdays, that she convinced herself that the calendar was a liar.

She would believe rather her looking-glass. She ran to it and glared into it; questioned it with anxious eyes. Such a frightened face as she saw there! —yet it was never the face of a woman reaching thirty-six years—thirty, perhaps, and well preserved; but not forty—no, no!

Yet that date resounded in her head like a funeral bell tolled once for each year of the departed one's life.

She remembered her photograph album, the long-neglected rogues' gallery of her fickle lovers. She found it, with the dust of years in its shabby plush. And there she found Douglas Wier staring at her from the first niche after the section devoted to her father and mother and herself as a child.

Yes, there he was, Douglas Wier, the Abou ben Adhem of her tribe of lovers. And across his vignetted lapel he had written his name in that well-remembered script, boyish and ragged, but full of confidence. And he had added the monogram of his fraternity, Delta Chi Delta, whose pins she had worn in his name and in the name of several later Delta Chi Delts. And he had scrawled also the year of his class—there it was. She tried to tell herself that she was only fifteen when he graduated. But that would have made her only eleven when she loved him as a Freshman—and such a fresh Freshman!

And now he was back again in college. He had just passed along the walk, under her window, the same window, though the sill was new and the shutters had been painted three times, and had needed another coat for nine years.

It struck her as ridiculously impossible that she should have seen him. She must have dropped asleep and dreamed him back. To make sure, she would watch. If he were real he would pass by again.

II

She took her place at the window and stared down fearsomely intent. Other young men passed. Some of them she knew from the year or years before. They lifted their hats to her. One of them was

"Pug" Leonard, who had fallen in love with her in his Freshman year; and fallen in love with another girl in his Sophomore year; a third in his Junior; and had doubtless come back to add at least one more affair before he graduated.

As he passed, "Pug" Leonard dared to look up and sing out:

"Hello, Lalage! Glad to see you again. You're looking younger than ever."

She hated his impertinence, but she forgave him much for that "younger than ever." It was just what she needed to hear.

For three hours she watched and waited, dreaming with open eyes of Douglas Wier. She remembered with a startling vividness their first meeting. Her father and mother had taken her to a reception, because they had no servant to leave her with at home. She must have been more than eleven—perhaps fourteen. Douglas Wier was at the reception, a Freshman, shy before girls, shabby in ill-fitting clothes, but with alert eyes.

He knew nobody, and sat alone on the stairs, eating his ice cream. She had crawled away there to eat her own. Somehow he spoke to her, and she answered him. They both trembled with the excitement of it. The Queen of Sheba's first words with King Solomon could not have seemed more important to her.

She did not see him again that year—to speak to. But she worshiped him from afar. Her father, who was a professor of Greek history, occasionally told some anecdote of him, some prank he had performed in the classroom. It was to her like hearing gossip of a king.

The next year they met again. He had a bit of the typical Sophomoric aggression. She had developed amazingly. He talked to her—lots. He asked if he might call. Her mother said she was too young; so they met clandestinely. Sometimes they stood and shivered in the moonlit snow. They were profoundly in love, but he was too young to dare to kiss her—except good-by the last evening before the summer vacation.

The next year he was a Junior and thereby a gallant. Her mother consented to his calling, to their going to parties together. The idea of chaperonage had not invaded the Arcadian life of Arden. She was permitted almost unrestricted privileges. All the girls were. Long drives together, long walks in the woods, late séances on the porch—everybody practiced them—nobody thought anything of it then.

In Douglas's Senior year he and his Lalage were accepted as affianced lovers in a prematrimonial intimacy. Their talk was all about the married life they should lead. The wedding was to take place the minute he got a position—no matter how small the wage.

Oh, but she wept the night after his graduation! —wept even though she believed that he would return for her soon—in a few weeks, perhaps; surely in a few months. If she had known or dreamed that twenty-two years were to pass and never bring him back!

And he had wept, too—boy that he was, for all his Senior dignities. Oh, tear-steeped kisses in the moonlight! Oh, hopes of young lovers, future forgetters, traitors-elect!

And now, just as she had almost forgotten him, just as the rains and snows of long years had worn the mound of their buried love to the level, he had leaped into apparition, passed beneath her window like the uneasy spirit of Denmark.

For three hours she hung upon the sill, waiting to confirm the witness of her eyes. At last she gave him up, accepted him as an hallucination, an accidental explosion of a neglected memory; look, where it comes again!

Along the walk the specter proceeded, floating again toward her window. But the footsteps were audible, real. He looked as he had looked when he graduated—only that his clothes were of the immediate fashion.

She leaned out to stare. He glanced up carelessly. His eyes met hers dully, with a blur of unrecognition. Even his ghost had forgotten her! He lowered his eyes before her searching gaze. But he looked up again, paused an instant, made as if to lift his hat, dropped his hand, and moved on, flushing a little at her earnest scrutiny. She followed him with a mournful stare, shook her head over him as one dead, or as though it had been Beatrice that met Dante's spirit in the other world and mourned his loss to earth.

A few steps farther, the ghost turned and tried to steal a glance over his shoulder; but, seeing her sentinel eyes still on him, went on in confusion. Just then Frank Chivvis came along, looked up at the famous window, waved his hat, and sang out, impudently:

"Oh, you Lalage!"

But she did not see him. The unknown passer-by

was looking back at her again, and walked on, looking back, till the low branch of a tree intervened. Then the ghost was gone.

After a moment of occult loneliness she realized that her ghost was only a coincidence, wearing by chance a reappearing resemblance. But how like he was to the first lover, who vanished down the walk with that same retroverted gaze and never came back.

Wasn't there a song or a joke or a series of caricatures called They Never Come Back? It was no joke to Lalage Lorton. It brought her head low and her tears in a stream. Girlhood, first love, first vows, illusions, hopes—they also never come back.

Cruelest of all, it was that Douglas Wier's wraith should return in his forenoon youth to her in her candlelighting hour. If he had come back old, and found her a spinster, it would have been harsh, yet much less harsh; but this confrontation with the living replica of his early grace was merciless.

It is the ultimate irony of the college widow's fate that she sees only young men—always young men and boys, an unending pageant of youth. The students who flock to the college towns are the most attractive portion of their sex at its most enticing age. They easily allure the young girls away from the town fellows that grow old alongside them and would normally be their suitors. The college boys cannot marry the sweethearts they make, and the end of their course is literally the commencement of their struggle for existence. They must spend that two, three, or four years of struggle in other towns; and in those other towns they meet other girls and mate with them.

The college-town girls cannot help growing up

and growing older. But the college boys do not grow up. The average age remains the same. They are born as Freshmen; they live four years, and—to that town—they die.

The academic current is like that great wave in the whirlpool at Niagara. The wave is always there, hardly shifting its outline; but the drops of water that form it hurry through at frantic speed.

And the girls are like the trees that grow on the banks of that gorge—slowly maturing to sapling shapeliness, flowering, making ready for fruit, losing their blossoms as sterile bouquets; then slowly drooping into old age. But the wave, eternally young, gleams and wavers and laughs before them. Always at rest, it never pauses.

Of all the types of old-maidenly pathos, the college widow is the saddest. She does not pine neglected, and grow used to pining like others of the overlooked, or like nuns immured in cloisters. She is swept through a serial romance, with a new lover every few chapters. Brilliant young scholars adore her, talk learnedly to her, write poetry to her; tremendous young athletes embrace her with brawny arms. She is singed with the fresh young fires of latent Byrons, Shelleys, Raleighs, Sidneys, and Admirable Crichtons. She knows moonlight passions, engagements, jealousies, dangers, quarrels, reconciliations—passions of varying intensity and surrenders of varying degree; she knows all about love and lovers, but nothing about husbands and a home.

Schooled only in flirtation, her dancing feet finally lay hold on the pit of despair; and before she has ceased to be a young girl she is already an old maid, and cannot believe it, cannot behave it.

When Arden University had been Arden College the president had given an annual reception to help the incoming strangers get acquainted with the good people of the town. It was at such a reception that Lalage Lorton had met Douglas Wier.

Nowadays the president gave no such reception. The college had outgrown the ingrowing town; the college was sufficient to itself. Lalage had watched it change from the little scholastic community where athletes were rare, where Latin was sacred and Greek supersanct.

"Prexy" was always a preacher then. Nowadays he was a business man, selected for his hustling powers, his abilities to wheedle endowments out of millionaires and browbeat the alumni into donations they could not afford.

Nowadays Latin was an elective—largely a neglective—course. Picturesque subjects, snaps for the big athletes who served as press agents, and comfortable classes for rich men's sons to dally with, made up the chief activities. Lalage's last three suitors did not suspect that "Lalage" was not her real name; they knew nothing of its connotation. And she could not explain how long ago she had earned the sobriquet, or by what claims of speech and of classic mirth.

The university gave no more its introductory reception, but the Congregational church, eager to recruit its attendance, gave a sociable that served the same purpose. This year the old ladies dared to ask Lalage to help them out. She accepted with a bitter smile, and they set her to selling cocoanut cake at five cents an entering wedge.

As she had hoped, her ghost was there, but he

seemed shy—as Douglas Wier had seemed shy. He seemed to know no one—as Douglas Wier had known no one. She asked several students his name, but none of them could tell her. He stared at her with the same eyes that Douglas Wier had fastened on her at their first meeting. He came up and bought a piece of cake—tried to speak; dared not. But he dared to buy another, and even a third piece of cake.

She broached the subject of the weather to hear his voice, and she quivered with emotion as she stammered:

"Nice evening, isn't it?"

And he gasped, "Isn't it?" as passionately as though he were proposing marriage.

She essayed a quip:

"We prayed for a nice evening, and you see the result."

"I don't wonder," he throbbed, and his eyes looked idolatry at her. But, though he lingered till he had pursued and swallowed the last flake of white sawdust, neither of them could rummage another word from their tempestuous souls. She had not learned his name, for all her evening's work.

But the next day he passed by. She spoke to him from her window. He lifted his hat, smiled—and blushed.

She watched where he went; discovered that he ate at the refectory and strolled back to Mrs. Pitkin's to study.

He was studying hard. She saw him one day at a window. She watched that window. The light burned late. She would sit for hours in the dark, staring at his lamplit curtain, her heart leaping with

excitement if the shadow of his head so much as crossed in silhouette.

It would not have been hard to ask Mrs. Pitkin his name, or to learn it in some other way; but she preferred to tantalize herself with guessing; preferred to imagine herself once more the young girl that waited a whole year, worshiping that wide-eyed Freshman and nourishing her heart on its worship.

One evening, when the young stranger went by from his dinner, she was sitting on the porch by chance—at least, she was sitting there.

She bowed to him, and swept him with one of those smiles an earlier generation had written poems about. In those days a student of Greek had called her by Aphrodite's epithet, "Philommeides"—or something like that—which he translated "Smile-sweet."

Before that historic smile the youth paused on the walk, riveted in a stare.

She said, "Why do you always pass by?"

He answered by coming in. He sank on the steps as though a siren had bewitched him for his bones. He stared at her so hard that she had to make all the conversation. She let the weather go, and tried to get him to talk about himself. Ordinarily that was not a hard accomplishment with the students, but it was only after the most persistent and adroitly veiled inquiry that she learned anything about this one. She learned that he had gone to another college for his A.B., but had decided to come to Arden for graduate studies because his father had been an Arden man in his day.

Ridiculous agonies clutched her as she heard these unimportant details. And she almost strangled as she asked:

"Who was your father? Perhaps I knew him."

He laughed aloud at this. It was the first time she had heard him laugh. The sound was horrible to her, for it was like a peal of rollicking gayety bubbling up from a closed grave. When he sobered down from his youthful parody of long-forgotten laughter, he explained:

"You? Perhaps you knew my father! Why, he graduated before you were born, Miss Lorton. His year was ——"

Again that clamorous year. She clenched her throat with one lean hand, to steady her words into the tone of idle curiosity.

"What was your father's name?"

"The same as mine," he laughed.

"But I don't—as a matter of fact I don't know your name." She said it in that liquid dulce-loquent voice of the old Lalage, and the young fellow's ears felt its music. His voice became gentler, and he said, apologetically:

"Oh, I beg your pardon! I ought to have told you. I thought you knew. Foolish of me, but I just naturally supposed that you knew; though, of course, you couldn't have guessed it very well, could you?"

"What is your name?" This in such a raucous, torn-out voice, that he started, then mumbled:

"I'm Douglas Wier, Second."

III

If only he had called himself "Junior," or "the son of," or anything but that newfangled "second"!

He sat and talked and talked—about his father,

she imagined; but she could not hear him, and she was not sure just what her other self, her ordinary, workaday self, said in reply—if anything.

The moon that had stared into the porch slipped under a cloud, and in the dark the young fellow on the steps was only a voice. Exactly that voice had murmured there how many times, how long ago! The shadowy form whence that voice used to rise used to reach up to the rocking chair where she sat, and take her hand; sometimes even lean his head against her knee and stare up into her face, whispering:

"I love you, Lalage. Sweet-spoken Lalage, I love you; you sweet-laughter!"

She used to bend down and stare into his moonlit eyes, and caress his cheeks, tousle his hair, tweak his ears. Then he would kiss her hand. Sometimes, when he had grown very sure of her, he would growl like a fox terrier, just like a fox terrier—it was a remarkable imitation. And he would snap at her hand, seize a finger in his teeth, and shake it snarlingly, as though it were a mouse. And how they would laugh!—softly, so as not to disturb the old people upstairs, but all the more deliciously.

She must have mused a long time over these relics of her first love, for suddenly she heard the real voice above the remembered voice.

"I must apologize for staying so long."

"Don't go," she said, from far away.

"I must. I've got to bone up. They push us postgrads mighty hard." And he was gone, leaving her to forlorn imaginings.

Two or three evenings later she was on the porch again when he passed. He did not wait to be asked. He said:

"May I come in?"

He stayed longer that evening, and again she heard his voice, like a remote murmur. Again he apologized for staying so late, but she had no idea of the hour.

He came oftener and oftener.

He fascinated her, held her spellbound with curiosity. It was like converse with the dead; it was returning to her own youth. In the shadow of the late clinging vines, or in the mellow radiance of the moon, she could imagine herself young—a mere girl again. Into her autumn there had come an Indian summer.

She was living back over her youth. Her blood ran along her veins in a spring tide. She felt anew the thrills of first womanhood. She realized that she was still all girlish, round, elastic, pliant. It was such luxury that she could not be glad enough.

She waited for Douglas Wier, Second, as for a magician who made the years vanish. He was a kind of hashish. She became addicted to him.

And then, one evening, he held her hand very long —seemed to find it hard to let it go. He bent and kissed it and dashed away, leaving her startled, awakened, with a shock.

IV

She told herself that she must rebuke him. She must not let him lose his head over her. But she had lost her head over him—or, rather, over the love proxy that he carried.

One evening—oh, but the moon was a very brazier of sorcery! The light from it had savor; it was a luminous perfume; an ecstasy.

She had never felt so free of the raiment of years. She reveled in youth; youth streamed through her like another moonlight. The moon that had waned had waxed again to the full orb. It issued from a cloud like a sudden gush of music.

Then young Wier reached up and took her hand. She was frightened, but she could not resist. He clung to it with both hands, brushed his cheek against it. He kept silent so long that she thought he must have fallen asleep.

She spoke to him. "What are you thinking of?"

"Of how much I love you."

He put his head back and looked up into her eyes. The moonlight overspread his face. His head lay in her lap like the head on the charger of the daughter of Herodias. She almost shrieked to find Douglas Wier staring up at her so uncannily from the shadow.

She pushed the boy away and managed to rise, with shaking knees.

"You must go now. It is very late. All the lights are out along the street."

"Do you hate me? Tell me you don't hate me."

"I don't hate you."

"Tell me you—love me a little."

"Good night, Douglas."

The name, once so frequent on her lips, came from her heart like a knife dragged from a wound, and it seemed that all her blood rushed out after it. She stumbled into the house.

The hall was full of ghosts. The stairway was haunted. Her room was weird till she could light a lamp.

As she undressed she lifted away a coil of purchased hair. She took off the graceful waist and

collar that spoke so well of her throat and shoulders. The light threw strong shadows on her cheeks, her deep eyes, and her neck. She saw her many, many years.

She glanced miserably at her bed, her narrow spinster's bed. She was an old maid. If Douglas Wier had kept his word she would have been a wife; this boy would have been her boy, instead of a taunting effigy sent to confound her with bitter mockery. Now she would never be a wife. She would never have a child.

She got out the photograph album. There was a tintype of herself and Douglas Wier taken together. Her skirts hardly reached her shoetops. She was awkward, but with the awkwardness of a young girl. Now she was gawky, with the ungainliness of a spinster. Then she was frolicsome; now she was kittenish. Now she was flat-chested and gaunt-hipped. Then she was narrow-hipped and shallow-breasted, but with the budding promise of early youth.

She stood revealed to herself, and she judged herself scathingly; but she blamed Douglas Wier for the bankruptcy of her hopes and her rights.

She blew out the lamp with a contemptuous puff. In the dark and chill of her bed she surveyed her soul as ruthlessly as she had surveyed her body. Here was more bitterness, for it came upon her suddenly what a desperate flirt she had been for years and years. She counted up her lovers. She could not remember them all.

At times this had given her a little flick of pride. Now it shamed her. She had begun life believing that one loves but once. She had given her one love

to Douglas Wier. She had wept and waited and hoped for his return.

He got his position—at a better salary than he had expected; but he had written her that he could not ask her to try to live on it with him. He wrote her proudly of his first raise of pay, but neglected to send for her then. He was offered a position that would take him to California, and accepted.

She had felt that he was false to her. She had cried for days. Then, in pique, she had accepted an invitation from another young fellow, a Senior, whom she would not have looked at when Douglas Wier was a Senior. She had been surprised to find how pleasant his company was. Before he graduated she had become engaged to him. He also had not come back nor sent for her. She revenged herself on him the same way. Consolation was even more facile.

After that the deluge. In turn, she had learned to be betrothed to one man and to encourage another; to be betrothed to two men and to run her engagement books with double entry. She had acquired the habit of telling each new man that he was the first she ever really loved. She had learned to believe it.

And so her soul had lapsed to a mere entertainer of transients, an inn where any traveler might put up. When the guests ceased to crowd in of their own free will she had stooped to encourage and to allure and to set her cap for patronage.

And now, as she regarded her naked soul with cynical eyes, she condemned herself as a promiscuous woman, incapable of fidelity, avid of excitement.

And for this also she blamed Douglas Wier.

The next evening Douglas Wier's son was at her

door again. She told her forlorn old mother to tell him she was ill. He went away, and she found the evening wretchedly long and lonely. Courtship of some sort had become a necessity, like a drug.

The next evening he came again and she went out to see him. But she was harsh with him; she wreaked on him the spite she felt for his father.

The boy was crushed with regret. He accused himself, begged her forgiveness for his presumption, but laid the blame on her beauty, her fascination, his irresistible love.

The irony of it! Douglas Wier had made a fool of her, had preferred another woman to her, had begotten a child for that other woman, and now that child, grown to his father's age, made love to the father's first love! She exulted in this burlesque of fate. She gave herself more to the young man's pleading, played with his affection, kindled it. Young Wier, with the frame of a man and the mind of a man, was an inexperienced novice in the power of such expert coquetry as Lalage had achieved. It amused her to see how madly Douglas Wier's son could be conquered by Douglas Wier's first conquest. Her last college year promised to be more interesting than any other since the first.

V

After a while of this ruthless experiment in vivisection Lalage was told by some of the town gossips that the Delta Chi Delta fraternity was to hold a formal initiation of such of the newcomers as it had been able to pledge from among those it had decided to honor with an offer of admission.

A few of the alumni were to be present at the ceremony to tell the awe-struck chapter how much of their dubious success in life they owed to their beloved fraternity. Lalage had forgotten to ask young Wier if he would join his father's Greek-letter society. She wondered now if he were among the initiates. He did not call on her that evening, and she wondered whether the secret of his fraternity would be the first he would have from her.

Late in the forenoon following the initiation Lalage's mother fluttered upstairs to tell her that she had a caller. The students did not call in the mornings. Her mother said that the visitor was a grown man—named Calvin Newby.

Lalage felt a strange thrill. Cal Newby had been one of her lovers. His class was three years later than Douglas Wier the First's. She had as glib a memory for class numbers as a broker for stock quotations. As she primped hastily she recalled Cal Newby as a big, ungainly, jovial creature, as awkward and as playful as a Newfoundland pup, always saying the wrong thing in the wrong way. But when she tormented him with rivals he moped and slunk about like a scolded and beaten poodle. His big dog eyes had drooled with tears and he had tried to write a sonnet to her. It was just about the sort of sonnet a Newfoundland pup would write.

He had left college to go to sea—his father was a freight-ship owner or something of that sort. He had promised to return for her with a sack of gold. And here he was at last. Had one of her lovers indeed come back? The very thought deleted nine years from her cheeks.

Her feet drummed a little flourish as she flitted

down the stairs and darted into the room. She forgot young Wier, and was once more all Lalage.

"Hello, Cal!" she cried, as she put out both her hands.

"The same old Lalage!" he said, as he took them. He was big, burly, matured, spectacled, but still a pup that never grew up. "This does take me back to ancient times again! How long ago was it?—a hundred years, I guess. We're both about twice as old as we were, but I can still see something of the old Lalage in that naughty little twinkle in your eyes. You're not wearing glasses yet, I see. I am."

He had begun by spilling at her feet a whole scuttleful of wrong things. She wanted to slap him. Still, she must forgive him much for coming back.

He plounced into a chair; it received him with a grunt of dismay. She placed herself as gracefully as possible in another chair. Newby continued to guffaw.

"Well, well, well! So you're not married yet, eh? You wouldn't think I had a son playing center rush at Princeton and a daughter that's already in long skirts, would you?"

"Really?" she said, regretting that she had not slapped him.

Still, he might be a widower. Widowers, she knew, came back. She listened for news. She was not kept waiting long.

"I ran down to the banquet of my old frat. My wife wanted to come, but I thought I'd like to get an evening off with the boys. Quite a crowd of the old fellows showed up. Most of 'em took the early train back, but I thought I'd stop over for a look round. Passed your porch. My feet turned in, just

as if I were an old horse remembering an old pathway. What a young fool I was over you, Lalage!"

She tried to laugh politely; it was a rather sickly effort—it would never have won her the epithet "sweet-laughing." But he went garrulously on:

"I wasn't the only one that was crazy about you. Not by a long shot. Judging from what some of the undergrads told us last night you're still the prize hen pheasant round here—still doing business at the old stand. . . . Well, well! What would Arden have been without you? Old Peplow and I got to talking about you. He was two classes ahead of me, but I licked him for calling on you on my evening. We rolled round the campus, and he pulled out a handful of my hair in his excitement. I gave you a lock of it. Got it yet?"

She did not answer, and he did not pause.

"Then Pinky Grimager—he's a famous physician now—joined us and confessed that he and you had planned to elope. He had the license bought and the minister arranged for, but you backed out. It was the night of the Junior prom., and you refused to miss it. Oh, but you were the wild young heartbreaker!

"Then Sam Tarrant butted in. He's a big insurance man now—came near going to the penitentiary during the excitement a few years ago. Sam offered to bet that he'd proposed to you oftener than anybody there. Tuck Crawford took him up, but Sam won by proving that he proposed to you after he left college. He said he wrote you half a dozen *ex post facto* proposals. Finally, when you didn't answer, he sent you a long telegram begging you to marry him. He says you answered in three words,

'Oh, shut up!' I guess you were wise. He's been vaccinated three times—it never took. Two divorces and one funeral.

"Tom Sprague said he pawned his overcoat to buy you a little diamond ring, and you lost it the next evening on a moonlight sleigh ride with another fellow. Larry Henshaw and Skid Kyle shook hands last night for the first time in eighteen years. They were both engaged to you at once, and they didn't speak all through their Senior year.

"Finally old Charlie-horse Ranney—remember him?—he's quite a prominent politician now—minority leader in the Oklahoma senate—he was up North, so he ran down to the initiation. Well, Ranney proposed that all your old flames organize a society like the exempt firemen, and call it the 'Ex-Lovers of Lalage Association, Unlimited.' Sam Tarrant seconded it, and I moved that we hold a convention once a year in Madison Square Garden. It passed without a dissenting vote from any of us. They elected me secretary. Good idea, eh?"

She sat cringing under the man's idiotic cruelty. She could have torn him to pieces, but it would have shown him that his words had weight with her. She preferred to mask her agony and smile. She said:

"It's a fine idea. I'm greatly flattered."

He looked at his watch and, to her infinite relief, gasped, "I've got to scoot for my train."

As he rose, the thought came to her terrifyingly that Douglas Wier, Second, might have been there and heard all this revelation of her. That would be an intolerable humiliation, the end of her one luxury.

At the door she said:

"By the way, Cal, did you initiate a fellow named Wier—Douglas Wier—last night?"

"No, I think not. I'm sure not. I'd have remembered that name. Old Dug Wier was coming down, but he couldn't get away. His wife wouldn't let him. He said he had a son here; I suppose he's after you, too. Oh, but you're the original Lorelei. Well, good-by. Take good care of the boys."

He was laughing so hard that he tripped on the steps and went galumphing down. Even this did not sober his Newfoundland hilarity. The only thing that could have wrung a laugh from her would have been the sight of him breaking his neck.

All that day sudden anguishes of fear went through her like hot flashes and chills. She could not believe that Douglas Wier had not been at the initiation or that at least he had not been told of the outrageous discussion.

She felt that he would never come to her porch again. But there he was as usual that night, punctual as the evening star. This comforted her, but she needed assurance. She ventured to ask:

"The Delta Chi Delts had an initiation last night. Did you go?"

"Me? Oh no. That was Dad's frat. You see, I went to Scannell, and there's no chapter of the Delts there. I joined the Phi Chi Psi's. And there's no chapter of that here. So it leaves me rather lonely; or it would if it weren't for you. You're my one friend here. This porch is my chapter house. I've been wondering if you would honor me by wearing my pin."

This was a fraternity emblem she had never worn. She had been decorated with all the rest of the Greek alphabet.

"I'd love to," she said, and he took it from his waistcoat.

"It's rather pretty," he went on. "The name is a secret, but I can tell you. I couldn't have a secret from you. The name is *Philotes chre psuches.* I don't imagine it's very good Greek, but it is supposed to mean, 'Friendship is a necessity of the soul.' Will you wear it?"

"Over my heart," she murmured, and pinned it there. Her phrase and the music of her voice stirred him to unwonted courage.

"There's one other emblem I wish you'd wear for me."

"What's that?" she asked.

"This ring. I've been carrying it for days. I—I've been afraid to ask you to put it on. May I?"

He seized the hand in her lap and, selecting the wrong finger, held the ring before its tip. She gasped.

"Why should you give me a—a ring like that?" In the collet a diamond glowed like another moon.

"Because I want you to wear it as—a—as an—an enga-gagement ring. Won't you?—please!"

"But, my dear boy, you don't want to be engaged to me!"

"Oh, but I do! It's the one thing I want most on earth—except one thing."

"And what's that?"

"To have you marry me. Will you? Could you? Won't you? Please!"

The proposal had been precipitated at her feet with such sudden slips and starts that she was all confusion. One might have thought she had never been proposed to before. All she could say was a weak:

"But you don't want to marry me."

"I do!"

"But you're only a boy!"

"No, I'm not. And, anyway, I'm a postgraduate."

She could not help a further argument: "But what would your father and mother say?"

"They wouldn't mind. They want me to be happy. Besides, I'm of age. I have my own money, too. An aunt of my mother's left me enough for us to live on, and I could earn more."

And then she began to laugh, a wild, imbecile, harsh laugh, with nothing dulcet in its metal. He edged away and stared in bewilderment.

"What are you laughing at?"

"I—I was just thinking—just thinking!" And she burst into another peal of hysterical clatter that woke her mother from sleep, upstairs.

"Thinking of what?" he pleaded. "Were you thinking that I am ridiculous?"

She could not be so heartless to him. It was not he, but his father and the procession of other false-swearers that she wished to hurt—not this poor devotee. So she caught his hands and patted them reassuringly, and said:

"No, no, dear, sweet boy. I wasn't laughing at you, but at something else. Forgive me. I—I—You'd better go now."

"But you haven't answered me."

"I can't now. Please go!"

"To-morrow?"

"Yes, to-morrow. Good night."

"Will you wear this ring till then?"

"Yes, yes, if you will go. Good night, good night!"

She fled within. He heard her laughing as she stumbled up the stairs. It was not pretty laughter. It alarmed her mother, who came barefooted and haggard to her door and, finding it locked, called through:

"What's the matter, Bertha? What on earth's the matter? Are you sick?"

"Yes, I'm sick. But I'm all right. Don't worry. Go back to bed. I'm all ri-i-ght!"

VI

She smothered her chuckles in her pillow; laughed till she cried; then lay for hours thinking. Her thoughts were as harsh as her laughter.

Here was her revenge; prepared, complete, and ready for consummation. To marry Douglas Wier's son! How the news would waken old memories in his heart! Old memories would ring in that hard shell like the roar in a conch from the sea. How he would try to explain to his wife! How she would rage at home and smirk to the neighbors!

They could not disown her or annul the marriage or tear the plain gold band from her finger.

Here was the wedding she had longed for, and her husband was young, handsome, brilliant, devoted. He had money. She would leave Arden at last as a bride. She would have a home, children. She would shake off that tenacious "Miss." She would be a "Mrs."

The Society of ex-Lovers of Lalage would die unformed. Her big, brave husband would knock their heads together if they breathed her name again. They would laugh secretly. There would be much

laughter over Lalage's elopement. They would call her a cradle snatcher; but the best and the last and the loudest laughter would be hers.

Even if eventually, when her imminent age would make her old, while her husband's youth had years and years to run—if then he should tire of her, and desert her, still she would be a grass widow, not that eternal mockery—a college widow. She would have known a little respite from celibacy. She would not die an old maid.

Oh, it was too good a chance to let slip! She fell asleep planning her trousseau, and she dreamed of her honeymoon on an ocean steamer and in London, Paris, Venice—by some Italian sea.

VII

She awoke exultant with holy vengeance and rapturous desire. They called her a Lorelei. Well, the Lorelei was driven to her pique and her cruelty by the ruin a lover had made of her trust. If the Arden Lorelei wrecked young Wier's life, had not his father wrecked hers? And the young man was young enough to get over it. She was too old to hope for another chance.

She feared only that some accident might yet forbid the perfection of her revenge, but he came that evening earlier than usual. Fortunately the dark twilight came earlier still, for when he marched up the steps his first words were, as he poised, trembling with anxiety:

"Well, what—what is your answer?"

"Yes."

He seized her with amazing immediateness, en-

veloped her with an embrace that threatened to crush her. She had not foreseen his strength or the ferocity of his joy. He covered her face with kisses, smotheringly. As though he were already her husband, he took his place in her chair and with unquestioning authority drew her forward to take her on his lap.

But she recoiled. She was afraid of this man. This was no ghost, no replica. This was not the timid Douglas Wier who loved her for a year and only kissed her when he wept to say good-by. This was a stranger, a tyrant. She did not know him. She dreaded him. But he would not be denied. His timidity had fallen from him as though her mere "Yes" had been a witch's abracadabra to transform him from a lamb to a tiger.

When she protested he laughed and silenced her lips with his own. He rocked her in his arms as though she were a child, and he talked of nothing but his unheard-of joy, his pride in her, his impatience to be wed at once. Further delay in Arden and further study of books were unbearable. He and his Lalage would study the world together.

She submitted to his caresses and his plans for fear of him. The thought of opposing him frightened all resistance from her. She hoped only that he would go soon and let her escape from the unexpected dominance of his new mood.

For a culminating horror, he raised to his lips the hand that wore his engagement ring, filled her palm with kisses, and then, in an access of infantile glee, caught one of her fingers in his teeth, growled like a fox terrier—it was a remarkable imitation; he even shook her finger snarlingly as though it were a mouse.

That was hideous enough; but he had to confess that the trick was not his own.

"You ought to hear my father do that. He gives a wonderful imitation. Sometimes, when he and mother are feeling spoony in their old age, he'll grab her finger and shake it and growl till you'd think it was a real fox terrier. And she'll squeal like a mouse. Oh, you'll love my mother and she'll love you."

To learn that her old lover was untrue to her was hard to bear, but to learn that he was amusing another woman with the silly love pranks he had invented for her was beyond endurance.

She broke away from the understudy of her first lover, and in a sharp voice insisted:

"I—I'm afraid I must ask you to leave me now. I—I'm so—so excited; I—I'd better rest."

"But you're happy, aren't you? You're terribly happy, aren't you?" he demanded, fiercely.

"Yes—yes, terribly."

She thought she would die before he ceased to kiss her good night. When he was gone she had not strength enough to mount the stairs to her room. She sank on the steps and stayed there a long, long while; once more made young by the magic of terror; once more as shy, as fearsome, as the little girl that Douglas Wier the First had found sitting on the stairway at the reception. It seemed centuries ago. She was once more that timid doe, scared at man and his ways.

VIII

Next morning the sky was dull and the sunlight had no mellowness. It was just daylight—cold, clear, cynical. It was not illumination, but exposure;

not color, but fact. It demonstrated everything in clear, cold lines and planes.

The angles of the bureau, the surface of the panes of glass, the wrinkles in the curtains, and life itself were all one pitiless geometry. Romance was puerile extravagance. Even revenge had no more red glow than the old wood stove that needed polishing without and had only ashes within.

As problems are often found resolved after a night's sleep, so her schemes were already debated, denied, wrapped up and put away on a shelf when she woke. She had no power to recall even her yesterday's enthusiasm. Her plan was just an impossible childishness, and that was all.

She got up, bathed, dressed, and went about tidying up the house with a finicky old-maidishness that she somehow accepted as her final and unalterable condition of servitude.

When Douglas Wier, Second, called that night she kept him at a distance and told him that she was wrong to have said yes and he was crazy to have asked her. She must say no.

But he could not accept dismissal. He caught her in his arms, kissed her, and called her his own. She overcame his ardor by her frigidity. She felt angry at him; she felt that he outraged her right to be herself and to give or withhold her own soul. But she quelled him most by her frigidity.

When he understood he reverted to his old weakness again. He pleaded, argued, insisted, pouted, and finally, with a complete loss of American ideals, broke down and sobbed.

She felt so sorry for him that at infinite sacrifice she brought herself to confess.

"You seem to forget that I am years and years older than you."

But he flung out, impatiently: "What difference does that make? Most men marry women that are younger than they are—and most marriages are unhappy, aren't they? The happiest marriage that ever was was Robert Browning's; and his wife was years and years older than he was."

She had only her confession for her pains; she felt that something must be done to absolve the victim of her incantation. It was not enough to be rid of him and let him grieve his heart out. She could not have treated a dog so heedlessly.

She cast about for some ether to suffocate his love painlessly. She remembered her fear that he might have overheard Cal Newby and the other old-wives' gossip at the initiation. She had feared that if he heard of the convention of her ex-lovers his love would die of disgust.

What might have served then must serve now. The convention in Madison Square Garden had already met in a small way in her photograph album. She would parade the regiment of ex-Lalage lovers before the boy and let them trample down his affection. She would show them all to him—except his father. That would be too humiliating to both of them.

Leaving him mopping his eyes and doubly shamed by his tears and the cause of them, she hurried up to her room and took the album from the table. It was heavier than ever, and as she came slowly down the steps she felt as if she carried the last of the Sibylline books.

She went to the sofa and motioned him to sit by her side. He came with alacrity.

Before she opened the album, she said:

"If I am to marry you"—at this his arm hastened to clasp her waist. It irked her, but she made no effort to escape it. She thought that it would soon retreat of its own accord. "If I am to marry you," she repeated, "there are certain things about my life that you ought to know—you have a right to know."

His right arm crushed her, and he put his left hand out to prevent the opening of the book.

"Oh, Lalage, I know you've been in love before. So have I—or thought so. I don't want to see the pictures of the fellows that have been crazy about you. They couldn't help it. I don't want to know their names. It might torment me if I ever met any of them. Just let bygones be bygones for both of us. Our lives are beginning all over again."

It was a lovable thing to say, and she looked up at him with a new tenderness and a stir of strange pity. On impulse she reached up and kissed him lightly, motheringly. It overjoyed him, for he did not know that it was a kiss of farewell, her "*Ave atque Vale!*"

She persisted, "But I must show you these pictures—some of them, at least—and then—"

"Well, if you insist, my love," he murmured.

Womanlike, she began at the last. She lifted the cover and the end leaf; there stood an amiable barbarian in football pelts. This man's name was hidden on the back of the picture, but young Wier laughed.

"Why, that's Colby—the football wonder—isn't it?"

"That's Colby," she sighed; but Wier seemed to feel an uplift of pride at winning what Colby had lost.

"Well, well! so the famous Colby loved you, too, eh? I went to see him play two years ago, but he wasn't in the game. He'd accidentally crushed his finger."

"Yes," she breathed. She hesitated for a moment, then braved it: "Colby was a savage sort of fellow. He was too wild for me. I—I couldn't stand him. Two evenings before that game he called on me; he kissed me in spite of my struggles, and I broke away from him and locked the door on him, and went up to my room. It was late and dark and he —he tried to climb up to my window. I saw his face peering in; I was horribly afraid, but I ran and pulled down the sash. It crushed his finger and he let go and fell. It was a wonder he wasn't killed."

And now they were both scarlet, and the man who was proud that the great Colby had loved his bride-to-be was muttering: "It was a pity he wasn't killed —the dog! If I ever see him—"

She ended the painful scene by turning the leaf. She realized that now his encircling arm clasped her with protecting ardor. She felt that she was not making great progress in her project.

"Who's that?" he asked, somewhat uncomfortably.

"That's Bob Kenebel. We were engaged, and— and he died. He caught pneumonia and died just before Commencement."

She felt a shiver run along his arm. Evidently the man who had died was an even more dreaded rival than the one that ought to have died.

"Next!" he mumbled, with a croak in his throat.

"That's Carl Heslewood. He—he was going to leave college to marry me, and he went to his pastor

in his home town and asked him to marry us. But the pastor—his name was Horace Pollock—here's his picture." She was skimming the front leaves rapidly.

"Good Heavens! Is Horace there, too?" The arm behind her seemed to wilt a bit.

"Yes, that's his picture. He told Carl that he oughtn't to marry me, because he had been engaged to me himself, and he—he had found out that I was engaged to another man at the same time."

"What a cad he was! It wasn't true, was it?"

"I'm afraid so. This is the other man's picture. See—Sidney Grinnell."

The arm at her waist was on the back of the sofa now, and her lover sighed to his depths. She was winning, but the triumph was not comforting. She turned to the back of the book again, but he groaned:

"I don't want to see any more."

"But you must, my dear. This is Stuart McQuoid. Handsome, isn't he?" There was no answer to this. "I wouldn't have him. He drank and gambled, even in college. When I found it out I threw him over, and he—he took poison. It didn't kill him. They saved him with a—a stomach pump, I believe. That part of it wasn't very romantic, was it? And before him I thought I was madly in love with this boy—Ralph Temple. He was a fascinating fellow, and I—well, I found out that he was engaged to two other girls in town and one at home; and then it was my turn to try suicide. I threw myself into the Arden River. I wanted to die, but I wanted to live, too, and I'm not sure that I didn't pick out a shallow place on purpose. But I caught a terrible cold and I've had rheumatism a good deal ever since."

"You have rheumatism?" he asked, feebly. She returned to the album and sketched him a few more reminiscences of a busy heart.

She knew that his heart was aching with mortal pangs; but he really loved her, and the better side of his heart overwhelmed the repugnances he suffered. At length he became masterly again. He slammed the book shut, dragged it from her hands, and dumped the chamber of horrors on the floor with a thud.

"I won't look at any more. It's fine of you to want me to know all that, but I can't stand any more. I'm sorry about all those other men. I wish I could have saved you from them."

"You'd have had to be born so long ago," she interposed, dolefully.

"I know that, too. I wish I were older than you, so that you would respect me more; but the one thing I know is that I love you, whatever you've been. It's better, I guess, to have a woman's extra lovers come before marriage than after. Nothing makes any difference, Lalage. If you love me and if I love you—nothing on earth matters."

She sat silent a long while, letting him hold her and shelter her from everything hateful and futile in past and future. She was very near to accepting his creed of "nothing matters." But even as she closed her eyes and swayed toward his heart her last glance fell on the album and she sighed:

"One thing matters, Douglas—one thing. There's one other picture you must see."

"No, no!"

"Yes!" She writhed from his arms and, dropping to her knees, reached out and drew the album to

her. Opening it again, she sat back on her heels and looked up into his eyes to watch him as he bent forward.

She saw his face jolted as if with a fist. She saw it whiten as the blood was sucked back into his wounded heart. She saw it flash crimson as the blood was regurgitated into every vein. She saw his mouth quiver and set hard, as though with sudden age.

"My father!" he whispered. He turned and stared at her, and seemed to appraise her years for the first time.

Then he threw his head back and laughed, shouted, writhed, rocked, with primeval uproar.

"My own father!" he howled. "My o-o-own fa-ha-ha-ha— Oh! ho-ho-ow—how—how—he—he"—all the imbecile noises the human animal shakes out when his diaphragm is seized with a colic.

Lalage sat at his feet, humbled to the lowest dust; she had had the last laugh for her own and she had turned it over to him. The martyrdom of ridicule is hard to bear with stateliness. She resented the absence of beauty and dignity in her sacrifice.

When he had laughed himself limp, and sat staring at her through bleary eyes, his lips still fluttering with the last bubbles of laughter, she said:

"Yes—that is your father. I owe everything—the whole ruination of my life—to your father. He taught me to believe that no man is worth trusting. He started me on the path of being a silly, shallow, hopeless flirt. I owe him this big album-load of affairs, with this pack of lovers and liars and forgetters. They're bad enough, but he was the worst of them. He took my heart when it was young and

innocent and he ruined my life. Your father was a cad—a cad and a beast."

"Oh, come now!"—and he glowered truculently —"I can't permit you to slander my father. Dad's a noble, splendid man. He was only a boy, then, and you've no right to cherish it against him. He's a splendid man, and I can't let even you criticize him."

"You can't, can't you? Well, then, you'd better go back to your father, and to that wife of his whose finger he shakes like a fox terrier. Go tell her that he used to work that trick on me! Go tell her that!"

It was unworthy of Lalage, but instinct taught her that it was the final stab to the boy's love. He rose in a hurricane of wrath.

"You leave my mother's name out of this. My mother is a good woman. She has no photograph album full of—of—a—a syndicate of lovers."

She thought of various crushing things to say in retort, but she had had enough of the Wier family. She was glad to see that this was to be the last of them. She rose from the floor, leaving the album there. She took off the engagement ring, took off the fraternity pin, placed them in his hand, crossed to the door, turned, and spoke with the melodious voice of the early Lalage:

"I was trying to cure you of your foolish infatuation. I think the cure is complete. I restore you to your parents with my compliments."

Then, with a bow of thirty years ago, she murmured:

"Good night, Mr. Douglas Wier, Second."

She swept out and moved up the stairs like a

grand dame of the old school; but she was giggling as only Lalage could ripplingly giggle.

When Douglas, left alone on the battlefield, realized his position, he set out for the door and stumbled over the bulky album. He gave it a healthy kick in his best football-punting style. It did him good and enabled him to march out of the house in excellent order, as befitted the last of the Lorton regiment.

Miss Lorton's window has thick curtains now; she has taken up fancy stitching and nursing, and the other jobs that make an old maid's life beautiful and her presence dear. Everybody remarks that her voice is more dulcet than ever, and invalids say that it is medicine just to hear her laugh.

VII

YELLOW CORDS

THE Rev. Cuthbert Beesley had not known horses any better than men. His acquaintance with horses had been limited to a few lessons at a riding academy, where he found his nag ready to ride, and rode it; then surrendered it to oblivion. The difference, however, between an occasional Valhalla flight along a bridle path and the pompless circumstance of nursing a horse with currycomb, pitchfork, and shovel, is a profound difference.

Mr. Beesley came late into the soldiery to fill the vacancy left by an ancient chaplain convicted of a murmur in the heart and other disabilities. Mr. Beesley reached camp late on a Saturday and wandered down a tented street, unknowing and unknown.

As he approached the picket line where the horses stood in two rows, facing each other, some old feud broke out among them, and they began to squeal and yell, bite and rear, buck and lash with blood-curdling ferocity.

A few troopers and the stable sergeant ran in among them like policemen plunging into a riot. They quelled the fracas without casualties, but their language was such that the Reverend Cuthbert melted away from the neighborhood as softly as the last snow of spring.

In the shelter of his tent he considered his situa-

tion with anxiety. If he were to justify his existence at all he must extirpate such customs of speech. And yet the task might be unpleasant and its success doubtful.

If he could have come to his highly secular duty more gradually, it would have been easier for him. If he had accompanied a wagon train along a sandy, hilly hike, and heard the teamsters explaining their wishes to their mules, he might then have retreated to the cavalry as to a refuge, and found it chaste by contrast.

In the cool twilight of his tent the Reverend Cuthbert conferred with himself, his conscience, and his discretion, and resolved to defer his counter-propaganda against casual blasphemy till he knew his parishioners better.

The next morning was a Sunday and he assisted the departing chaplain in holding a service on the hillside. The air was balmy, the sky an azure canopy, and the vision of the soldiers standing bareheaded, or kneeling on the grass, filled him with grace and with such apostolic ecstasy that the lake before the camp might have been the Galilean sea.

Even the picket line was at peace. The horses dreamed or meditated their Sabbath hay in all docility.

Late that afternoon there was a parade before a multitude of visitors. The spectacle was superb. Old Doctor Chichester rode with the staff for the last time, and the staff went by the reviewing officer like a row of great toy horsemen all cut out of one block. The band played, the silken standards purled, the guidons snapped, and the horses and men were a pride to behold.

The Reverend Lieutenant Beesley was glad to be alive, and he told himself that a chaplaincy in the cavalry of a nation making ready for a holy war against cruel infamy was the priestliest of offices.

The next day the regiment entrained for the concentration camp. He met his men in the crowded cars. It was Monday, and he did not have to work or even to feel like a preacher. He took immense delight in the hilarious good comradeship of his flock.

For several days they rode, and the train rocked with laughter, song, and such youthful pranks as while away such voyages. The officers were fine fellows and their technical talk was fascinating.

They told what they would do when they got abroad. They ridiculed the theory that cavalry was out of date.

Colonel McNair, a major in the Regular Army, had been assigned to command this Guard regiment, and he believed that a man was never quite a man unless he had a horse between his knees. To a throng gathered about his section in the old sleeping car, he stormed:

"Give me an automatic pistol and a gang of boys with real rifles on the rings, boys who can fight on their feet or on their bellies as well as in the saddle, and can travel light and forage on the country and —well, all I've got to say is, if we'd been over there in 1914 those Uhlans would have worn their death's heads pointing for home, damn 'em all to—the place Mr. Beesley knows more about than we do."

That sort of profanity did not displease Mr. Beesley. In fact, it would have been insubordinate to be displeased at anything his commanding officer said. It thrilled him to hear such things thus emphasized,

and he saw himself on his way to Berlin. The racket of the wheels on the rail had the sound of Uncle Sam's horseshoes going clickety-click up the Unter den Linden. He could almost see the palsied Kaiser peering out of a palace window, his mouth an "Oh" of awe between his drooping mustaches.

The retiring chaplain, Doctor Chichester, had owned his own horse, and had taken it home with him. Mr. Beesley was promised a new mount at the new camp. Through a characteristic mix-up in train management the regiment was separated from its horses, and preceded them to camp by two days. The cavalrymen were loud and blue in their disgust. But there were new horses for the new officers, horses from the remount station, most of them raw, drafted horses, civilian nags without military ambition or training, four-footed rookies that knew not the troop drill and were afraid of a bugle.

Stable-Sergeant O'Bannon told the chaplain, with as much deference as an O'Bannon could feel for a Protestant, that he could have his pick of the string. The chaplain was not long in selecting the best-looking mount of the lot. He was a bit ashamed of his selfishness, but he felt that he owed it to his cloth.

"I think I'll take that one, Sergeant, if you don't mind," said the chaplain.

Sergeant O'Bannon recommended a much bigger one, an old throop harse and an ilegant rider. But the chaplain was afraid of such a lofty steed. He dreaded to fall so far. Besides, he had not yet learned that an old officer always obeys his sergeant; and he was sweetly stubborn.

"I'll take that one, please," he repeated. "What's his name?"

"Moyna, sor," said the sergeant.

"But Moyna is a—a—er—"

"So she is, sor," said O'Bannon. He pushed his way between Moyna and the adjoining horse, unfastened the halter from the picket rope, and backed Moyna out. He bridled her and flung a saddle across her back, and cinched it till she grunted.

But she made no protest and seemed to be rather amused at the game. She rubbed her muzzle against him and arched her neck and nibbled him with her lips.

"He's a nice mare," said the chaplain, "and very affectionate, isn't he-she?"

"Yissor," said O'Bannon. "But I misdoubt her favryte forage is loomps of candy from the hand of a gerl."

Moyna was a beauty and seemed to know it. She was a flirt and a humorist. She had an eye of burnt sugar, a caramel eye; and her neck was as glossy as if it were covered with the shining integument they make silk hats of.

The sergeant held her head while the chaplain mounted. Moyna made no objection to his weight. She turned round and looked at him, and nibbled at the boot of the stirrup.

But when he gathered her and signaled her to go forward she did not seem to understand the language of knee and heel.

"She's not bridlewise, I'm afraid," said the chaplain, patiently.

"She's too dom wise," said O'Bannon. As long as O'Bannon led her or pushed on her side she went where she was steered, but there was small satisfaction in that, and the chaplain ordered the sergeant to give her her head and stand off.

O'Bannon gave her her head and stood off, and Moyna pirouetted awhile. Then it struck her as a quaint and interesting whimsy to glide along the picket line and bunt the dock of every horse that stood there.

This caused a deal of commotion among the other horses, and still more in the chaplain's bosom. He had anxious visions of his right leg being kicked through Moyna's ribs by any or all of the horses as they surged forward and back.

But he could not dissuade her from completing the course. When she had tagged every tail in the row she was satisfied, and trotted away in perfect obedience.

The chaplain made a few turns about the camp, and won most of the arguments with Moyna. But he lost enough to make him stubborn, and when he restored her to O'Bannon and O'Bannon suggested that he had better reconsider his choice, the chaplain said, with grimness:

"No! I'm going to conquer that da—that damsel or die."

He was shocked to realize how near he had come to filling the gap with the colonel's favorite word.

There were mounts enough for the field and staff, but none for the men, and when the commanding officer of the division expressed a wish to review the newly arrived regiment, its grumbling members paraded afoot.

Remembering the sturdy picture the former chaplain had made, the Reverend Cuthbert resolved to make a sturdier. Moyna was his charger and she was most demure till she reached the parade ground. Then she seemed to think she was expected to do a

pas seul. In entire independence of the orders by voice or bugle she curveted and caracoled and traveled where she would. It was highly amusing to the soldiers, but miserably humiliating to the chaplain. The colonel shouted at him, and he moaned to himself, "Tell that stuff to the horse."

When the line swung into column for the march past, and the major general and his staff stood like bronze equestrian statuary, waiting for the colonel and his staff to ride by, Moyna played the prima donna all by herself.

She executed a perfect side step in spite of the chaplain's frantic signals for a forward march. She sidled awhile, then backed and whirled. The chaplain tugged and kicked, but he was as helpless as a skipper on a rudderless, anchorless sloop.

The staff went on without the chaplain, while Moyna drifted backward through three platoons of pedestrian cavalry. The lines opened out to let her pass, but one rude fellow, to avoid being stepped on, handed her a mighty smack on the rump and told her:

"Git the hell over, you ——!"

The chaplain did not say the traditional "Thank you," but he looked an absolution, though he heard the speaker's elbow neighbor rebuke him with a gruff:

"You poor nut, that's the chaplain." He heard the offending nut exclaim, "O my Gawd!"

And then they marched on while he floated shamefully to the rear.

The chaplain and Moyna never did get reviewed by that general. He sailed away to France and she was remoted to the picket line.

The chaplain had about resolved that he would ride thenceforward in the ambulance or resign and go home, or at least demand a transfer to a motorcycle or a motor-truck company. But the next day the regimental horses arrived.

It was a blessed sight to see the detraining of them and the welcome they gave their masters and got in return. Worried and jostled by the long imprisonment and the endless hurry through strange landscapes, the whinnying steeds rejoiced to escape to the open air. They were in a frolic mood. They were proud to be soldiers and they loved the discipline and the display of their own learning.

The regiment rode into camp bareback with only the halters on. The horses were re-established on the picket line, familiar head opposite familiar head. The climate was strange and the odor of the illiterate horses from the remount station was offensive, but it was good to be at home on the line again.

The drills were inspiring, too, to footsore men and their eager chargers. The bugle calls spoke a beloved language to their hungry ears, and they wheeled into line and column of platoons or squads or half squads or files, ployed and deployed, at the walk, the trot, or the gallop, as happy as children playing at war.

A bit of good luck fell to the doleful chaplain, for he fell heir to the horse of an officer suddenly transferred to another duty. This horse was named Texas, in honor of the state that he honored. He was a mighty engine with a gentle soul.

The chaplain swarmed up into the lofty saddle with difficulty, but once aboard he felt assured that Texas had been built to order for him and he for

Texas. His native rhythm and the chaplain's were as melody and accompaniment.

He had a mouth so tender—Texas had—that a twitch of the little finger reined him in, a thought of relaxation let him out. He was such a scholar in the lore of heel and knee that he might have had electric signal buttons on his ribs. He turned on the forehand or the haunches, he backed or stood, he executed the two tracks or the shoulder-in with uncanny divination. He was a wrist-and-heel reader. He made a lilt of the square trot and for the first time in his life the chaplain posted without anxiety or bumps. He rose and sat as cozily as at a prayer meeting and found the saddle always just where he wanted it.

He ventured timorously into the roads, and Texas asked only a little release of rein to become a tornado of speed. He charged the horizon with shoes of fire, but with the smoothness of a heavenly chariot. A little leaning back and a slight closing of the scissors of the thighs, and he reduced his velocity without a struggle. He came down to a dog trot, a walk, a half halt, a dead stop.

Texas carried out of camp a timid *débutant* on horseback. He brought home a confirmed centaur. He knew the bugle better than the chaplain did.

He "shook hands" for apples or carrots or just for sociability. He fluttered his nostrils in a welcoming whir whenever the chaplain came near. And Lieutenant Cuthbert came near often, for he envied the man who took care of Texas. He wanted to be a hostler, too, and rub down the steaming pelt with a wisp, and hold the pail while Texas pumped it dry, and look to his bedding and the fitting of his saddle blanket to the nicety of a hair.

The troopers grumbled at their endless tasks; they cursed the call to stables; the necessity of polishing off the horses as if they were mahogany; the countless rules for keeping their patients well and clean and warm and dry, and watered just enough, and shampooed, barbered, and chiropodized.

But they loved what they berated and they were tender, for all their profanity. A man who mistreated a horse had O'Bannon to reckon with and the contempt of his fellow troopers.

The colonel was merciless to the man who was not merciful to his beast. The chaplain went to school and solaced his loneliness with the companionship of Texas.

The horse taught him warriorship, *élan*, and the pride of the tempest. They went out together and practiced jumping ditches, fences, and walls, charging embankments, tobogganing declivities, and indulged in bursts of speed with abrupt stops.

And one night the chaplain dreamed that he went into battle with his regiment and won the cavalryman's prayer that death shall come to him and his horse in the glorious crisis of a victorious charge just as the shattered enemy breaks and flees from his abandoned guns.

So in the chaplain's dream he rode in among the panic-smitten Huns with an apocalyptic fury, and there a shell broke itself and him and his charger to pieces and released his soul. So fiercely he had ridden that his ghost and the ghost of his charger rode right on through the dark valley and up a great cliff, and on across a meadow of sky, where the clouds were but fences and walls.

Texas swept on with him into the gate of the

golden city and down the golden streets to the Great Headquarters.

And there the chaplain reined him in so sharply that his hind feet threw out sparks as they slid along the porphyry before the throne.

A moment he waited till Texas was erect again, and then he saluted. The adjutant angel returned the salute, and directed:

"Take your post, sir!"

The chaplain was almost sorry to wake and realize that the brazen music he heard was not from the trumpets of heaven, but from the cheeks of the unshaven bugler yawning reveille.

He was sorrier still when officers' call summoned him and the others to the colonel's tent to hear the ghastly news that the glorious Ninety-fifth was no more. The stroke of somebody's pen had ordered its disintegration into two battalions of machine gunners.

Colonel McNair tried to give the obedience he had exacted. He swallowed his own old prophecies of what the cavalry would do to the Teutons and explained that cavalry was of no use in Europe.

He choked as he ate his words and made a pitiful failure of his effort to conceal his broken heart under a screen of severity.

His officers wavered under the blow, and, when they were dismissed, wandered away to exchange insubordinate protests.

They assembled their men and tried to imitate the colonel, tried to pretend that they were bearers of glad tidings, great news of promotion from the contemptible estate of cavalrymen to the magnificent rank of machine-gun pumpers.

The men made no pretense. They had no commissions to lose. If they went to the guardhouse, so much the better. They raved and roared and kicked the ground, and their profanity attained a crudity the chaplain had never imagined possible.

Colonel McNair let them rage, for he was to be called elsewhere. It would be the new commander's business to whip them into line.

The chaplain remained with the regiment and tried to welcome the new officers. After all, they were not to blame, but they had surly treatment from the men. There were open threats of sabotage. Perhaps it was fortunate that the guns were late in arriving. They might not have survived the first reception.

The horses, not knowing what had happened, except that the bugles summoned them to the field no more, wondered at the affectionate tenderness of their idle riders.

Crowds stood about the picket lines and leaned on the horses' backs and stroked their glossy pelts, slapped them, and cursed them lovingly, and gave them every care but exercise.

And then one loathsome morning a gang of strangers from the remount station, miles away, appeared to carry off the horses of the Ninety-fifth. The chaplain understood, and shared the helpless agony of the rough soldiers, wanting to cry and not daring to, wanting to fight and not daring to.

They watched in sickly groups the brisk work of the remount pirates, to whom these partners of glory were but a herd of cattle. They stripped the picket line of their halter ropes; each man mounted one horse and led a bunch of others.

And the poor steeds, thinking they were going out to water or to some new battle drill in dismounted formation, trotted off as meekly as lambs to the slaughter.

The ex-cavalrymen of the Ninety-fifth ran down to the roadside and poured out their wrath at the thieves of their flying-maned friends.

It was useless to try to lock their hearts after their horses were stolen. They moped about forlorn, their occupations gone. Their ears ached for the stable call, their arms for the pitchfork, and their palms for the currycomb.

But their wishes were not their horses and the beggars could not ride.

To add insult to injury, they had to give up their insignia as cavalrymen—their buttons with the crossed sabers, and their yellow hat cords. If they had changed to the crossed cannon of artillery and the scarlet cords, it might not have been so bad. They could still have gone to battle riding on caissons or on the horses that drew the guns.

But they were only footmen now, with a pair of muskets on their collar buttons and on their hats cords of baby blue. They must ride Shanks' mares, push armored baby carriages about the rough ground, and groom popguns instead of horses. They would be plumbers and not soldiers. A number of the officers began to pull wires for a transfer to the Aviation service. They must ride something. Better to fly and fall than creep and crawl.

But for the enlisted men there was no escape. They were told that the day would come when they would thrill with the power of spraying death from their chattering machines, lifting the muzzles from

some nest of hidden emplacement, and scything the enemy down in sheaves of terrible harvest.

But as it had taken a long and painful time to make them good cavalrymen, so it would take a long and painful while to unmake them.

They felt betrayed and shamed by an ungrateful republic, so shamed, indeed, that when they went home on furlough they took off the despised blue cords and circled their hats in yellow till they came back again to camp.

The chaplain tried to comfort his flock and teach them patriotic meekness, but his counsels were half-hearted. And when he heard them swearing everywhere and all the time, his only sincere regret was at the hopeless inadequacy of their vocabularies.

It is unwise and unsafe for men to try to interpret the souls of animals in terms of their own.

What the exact reasons were for the extraordinary behavior of the horses of the Ninety-fifth can never be found out. The fact of the act is all there is to tell.

The horses of the regiment were miserably discontent with their new conditions. Among the herds of animals bought in all parts of the country by all sorts of buyers under all sorts of inspection they were mustered in camps like the draft of soldiers. The officers were too driven to see or correct the derelictions of such men as could be picked up.

The horses of the Ninety-fifth were used to change of residence, but they could not understand the change of business. Strange persons were caring for them as little as possible and cursing them in unfamiliar and unfriendly tones.

The horses had been brought up in the good old cavalry religion:

"After a horse is assigned his rider will not exchange him nor allow him to be used by any other person without permission."

This canon was ruthlessly violated. Riders of every sort tried these horses, exercised them, herded them to water, but never to drill.

The good book also said that the trainers of remounts "should be chosen for their love of horses and their patience and gentleness."

The Ninety-fifth's had fallen among the heathen, indeed. They were badly bitted, their saddle blankets put on against the hair; they were cinched too tight; sent to bed unkempt in unaired bedding; hitched at once after heavy work, to cool in haste and die at leisure. Often they were left unclothed in icy winds and unsheltered in keen rains.

So they were left one night of tempest. The stables were overthronged, and they were condemned to the open, crowded corral. The Ninety-fifth's horses drew together in a companionship of familiarity endeared by misery. Whether the lightning and the barrage of thunder frightened them or inspired them, somehow the impulse to rebellion rose among them.

Texas began it, perhaps. He began to lead a mob of riotous steeds about in a fierce circle, pressing against the fence of the corral here and there. The deluges of rain washed the ground away from some of the posts, and at last over they went. There was a gateway now to liberty.

But the less resolute were afraid of their freedom. The lightning flashes disclosed weird scenes and effaced them again. The world was dripping with steel chains of glistening beads. They could not imagine what to do with their opportunity.

But Texas knew. He picked his way across the broken timbers. A bold horse followed him—another —others—all the Ninety-fifth's old veterans. While the stable guards slept or gambled in their shelters the prisoners assembled.

Texas gave the command and they fell into line on the parade ground, knowing their places by their neighbors, butting in, and nosing out their stations in ranks, and dressing the line.

They stood awhile, no doubt, swaying and champing for the bugle call. Perhaps some high, shrill clangor of thunder gave it. They broke from the right into column of squads, and trotted off into the dark.

Texas, as an old staff horse, had been used to trotting at the head of the column. He took the lead now, and nearly three hundred horses followed him, remembering what they had learned and obeying their remembered ghostly riders.

Down the road they pounded, led by an instinct of direction, roaring across the stretches of highroad, slashing through the bogs, and sending up sheets of spray from the deep pools.

A few belated travelers, pushing through the storm and hearing that terrestrial thunder, turned quickly out into the ditch or cowered in terror and watched the long defile sweep past, thinking themselves bewitched.

Where the road narrowed through some ravine, the column closed to half squad, and extended again as the road widened. And in one open stretch of fenceless prairie, as the tracks showed the next day, the column deployed into line. They had charged, then rallied, formed column again, and pressed on once more.

The artillery of the clouds ceased fire, the rain fell no more, and on the gloom of night the patterns of the dawn were woven of crimson skeins. But the horses of the Ninety-fifth continued their march and reconquered the miles that kept them from home.

They were not yet there when the bugler riddled the slumbering tents with the hateful racket of reveille. The disconsolate cavalrymen wrenched themselves from slumber, groped for their clothes, buttoned themselves hastily in, and formed the seedy lines of the first roll call.

They had no horses to look for and no future that they desired.

And then the horses came back. A thunder beyond thunder rose and roared. The roll calls were forgotten in the excitement. The chaplain, emerging from his tent, saw Texas come proudly up the main street, followed by the riderless, saddleless, bridleless multitude.

They went through the camp in perfect school, undisturbed by the shrieks of welcome that broke from the men. The horses proceeded to the picket line and there broke ranks, fell into place, kicked and shunted aside the few sorry animals they found there, and looked for the fodder they expected.

Now they were charged in turn by their old riders. The men came leaping, shouting, hurling their hats in air.

They ran to their horses, each man to his own, and wrapped his arm about the great neck, and rubbed noses with the lost that was found again.

Many a man wept foolish tears and tried to mask his shame by an excess of profanity. All ran for fodder, tore bales of hay to shreds, robbed stores of

oats, stole from the very kitchens, and made what feast they could for the returned prodigals.

The chaplain did not swear at Texas, but he lavished caresses on him and gave him his own breakfast.

The remount men reached the camp of the Ninety-fifth soon after. The noise of the stampede had alarmed the guards. They had followed the tracks by the flashes of lightning. The remount men were ugly mad. They had lost their sleep, ridden long and hard through the storm. They claimed the horses without the grace of a regret.

They were made as welcome as the Huns would have been. They would never come nearer lynching and live than they came then. Bad language abounded, and there were numberless gory fist fights.

The chaplain realized that the homecoming was too beautiful to be in this world of war and sorrows. He parted what fighters he could and pleaded his men into a semblance of discipline. They fell back and surrendered. As the chaplain was heard to say later, "If the remount men had been gentlemen of tact they would probably not have been remount men."

It was not an unprejudiced judgment, but, at any rate, they felt triumphant over the infantrymen-in-spite-of-themselves and seemed to feel called upon to teach the runaway horses a lesson.

A few of the poor beasts yielded without debate and consented to return to exile. But others fought viciously against another hateful banishment from the recovered home.

With these the remount orderlies dealt brutally, and the chaplain had all he could do to restrain his

men from murder. He kept them in hand, begging them to remember that they were soldiers; that obedience was their duty and patience their merit.

He even dared at last to beg and implore them to quit themselves like men and not even curse. They obeyed him, too, and stood the test like martyrs. The chaplain was a little proud of his power over them.

And then a snarling thug seized Texas by the halter, and, when the horse refused to go, jerked his head and beat him in the face with his fist, and, failing still to master him, dared to kick him in the ribs and belly.

Then the Rev. Cuthbert Beesley, with a kind of whinny of pity for his horse, and with a wild neigh of inarticulate wrath, jumped on that wretch, smote him in the face, and knocked him into the muck, and stood over him, roaring:

"You'll never kick my horse again, you —— —— —— —— ——!"

The remount man begged for mercy and was permitted to live, and he and his fellows completed their odious task with all available decorum.

The men of the Ninety-fifth watched their horses go again in a funereal silence. None of them had such a load of regret as the chaplain. He had remorse to bear as well, and he quivered with shame at what he had done and what language he had used.

But of all the wise and praiseworthy sayings he uttered in his otherwise blameless career, that speech of his was the one the regiment quoted oftenest and loved the best. They called him the Reverend Cussbert, and meant it as a title of honor.

And finally, one Sunday morning, the chaplain

took for his text, "Ask and it shall be given unto you." His real theme was a clipping from a newspaper, handed to him by one of the officers: "Acting under the recommendations of General Pershing, the War Department has ordered the organization of five more regiments of cavalry, in addition to the complete division of cavalry already under way."

The chaplain used it as a proof that prayers are answered.

That was the first sermon of the Reverend Cussbert's that had ever been received with three cheers and a tiger.

VIII

THE SPLIT

I

WHAT Edna did to the war is not worth mentioning, but what the war did to Edna—!

Among the countless things that have been written about the world conflict there seems to have been no record whatsoever of the most excruciating of all the torments to which the women who stayed at home were subjected. Of course, every devoted wife or sweetheart endured agonies of anxiety, each for her hero in the dangers of battle; and she endured it with a fortitude that can never be sufficiently celebrated. But there was a further and perhaps more intolerable test of mettle, and that was the thought of the gantlet her hero ran among the women at large in France.

The more the women who went along were heralded as angels the harder it was for the women who stayed at home to stand it; for Heaven helps men who stray among devils, but who under the sun is to help the man who wanders among angels?

The worst of it was that the government forgot the solid Puritanical standards which, we are assured, made America what it is to-day, or, at least, what it ought to be to-day. The government issued an order forbidding wives and sisters of persons in

the military service to go to war with their men-folk. But it permitted all sorts of other women to go!—even actresses!! It actually encouraged actresses to go to France!—to amuse the men!! It is a wonder that we were allowed to win the war at all.

Later, the ungodly government, as if to drive the wives to rebellion, modified its first order so as to permit sisters to go along. Of course, the government knew sisters. It knew that they would never bother their own brothers. They never did at home; why should they in France?

The women of Carthage were fairly distraught. Actresses are unknown in Carthage except by reputation, but such a reputation! After the National Guard company and the volunteers and the draft men had been taken away, leaving hardly an able-bodied youth in town, a number of women went over, women unrelated to any of the men.

They became at once the subjects of intense attention. Edna Eby alone was thought of as a fit companion for young males going into the solemnities of battle, for Edna was as nice and solemn a young woman as Carthage ever produced.

Downright indignation, however, was expressed at the recklessness of the government in subjecting the poor soldiers to the influence of Miss Belle Cumbers, who sang soprano in one of the choirs. Everybody knows how dangerous choir singers are.

Mrs. Belle Gaddy said that she went because her husband was too nearsighted to pass the examinations and somebody had to represent her family. It seemed only natural that Mrs. Hattie Shingle should go, because she was a widow and an elocution teacher, and would be of great value in stimulating

the soldiers to deeds of valor by reciting some of her best pieces.

The only woman who escaped open criticism was Edna Eby. She was plain and tame and exceedingly pious. It was generally admitted that she said better prayers than anybody else in her church on Wednesday nights. She would lend a much-needed element of sanctity to the battlefields.

While the left-at-homes were dissecting the went-alongs, the went-alongs were dissecting new forms of life. France, at any time, would have given Carthage women stuff enough for comment, but France in war, with all the laws and conventions of God and man forgotten or turned topsy-turvy, was matter for exclamation indeed.

All the women had promised to write regularly, but Edna Eby, as usual, was the only one who kept her promise. Her first letter went to her mother; her second letter to her pastor. And he read it out loud in church, which gave poor, lonely Mrs. Eby the greatest pride she had ever known:

Dear Doctor Swanton,—There is so much to write that one hardly knows where to begin. We passed through the "Dangers of the Deep" without accident, thanks to the all-watching eyes of Providence. We were especially grateful for this mercy, since just before our arrival a hospital ship loaded with wounded and nurses was torpedoed, and few survived.

Such discrimanation leads one to believe that they have been spared for some good purpose, and I hope in all humilaty to be of some service in this beknighted land where, as I understand, there are hardly more than one or two Congregationalist churches.

We arrived at Paris on the Sabbath, and the scenes were shocking; people going about and shops open as if on a week day. It was especially discouraging to see persons seated right out on the sidewalk and drinking. Many of them, alas, wore the American uniform. There is a great opening here for a local-

option movement to lead the way for prohibition. I hope to do something in my humble way to put an end to this wicked habit, at least in our own army.

Then, after the war is over, I should esteam it a blessed privilage to spread the glad tidings among these poor people who have not had the advantages of such sermons as yours and such home life as we know in Carthage.

I have not been assigned to duty as yet, but I am already selecting hymns which will have the best effect on the soldiers, and I hope to win many of them to better living by prayer meetings. From some of the language I cannot help overhearing—I refer to the American language, for, though I fortunately cannot understand what the French and English soldiers say, I am convinced that many of our brave men are just aching to be taught a proper reverance.

There was more of the same tenor—or soprano. The army, however, was too much for poor Edna.

She would have been shocked to death if she had not soon arrived at a condition of spiritual coma in which she could not be shocked at all. But she transmitted shocks to Carthage with multiplied power.

The pastor never read them from the pulpit. In fact, she did not write to him again. Her mother brought him letters from Edna to her and asked him what in Heaven's name was to be done about the girl. He left it to Heaven.

The Carthage ladies were stationed in the village of Fargeton, helping to conduct a large Red Triangle hut. It was well to the rear of the battle line and most of the customers were French and English and Italian soldiers. Edna had not yet had a chance to begin redeeming the Americans, and she was worked so hard that she could hardly find strength enough to take her clothes off at night and put them on again in the morning.

One of the first startlers she landed in Carthage was a letter in which she said:

Just time for a line, mother honey. I'm so dog tired of nights I fall asleep in the midst of my prayers, if I remember to say them at all—which is not always. I poured 2,640 cups of chocolate to-day—which is going some for little Edna, as the boys call me.

Thank the Lord, to-night I shall sleep in sheets for the first time in a month. We don't get them, but the nicest young sergeant you ever saw got a pair issued to him, and he said he couldn't bear to use them when I had none, so he gave them to me.

Don't be excited, mother darling; he's perfectly nice. He's an American sergeant sent ahead on some *liaison* work for the Intelligence. He only gave me the sheets because I had lent him my hot-water bottle one night when he had cramps in his tummie. So you see it's perfectly all right.

Now I'm off to dreamland's ice-creamy mountains until, as the song says, "that dirty pup wakes the bugler up."

Poor Mrs. Eby was still quivering with this when Edna's next letter announced the approach of a certain Lady Keenbrook.

We're all crazy to see what she looks like. We've never seen a real lady with a capital L.

Belle Cumbers says that she intends to show this English snob that an American lady is quite as good as anybody, but it's easy to see that Belladonna (as we call her, because she makes such eyes at the men) is simply perishing to rub up against her. So are we all.

Nighty-night, mother dear. I'm so proud I don't know what to do. I broke the record in cigarette sales to-day. I sold more Bill Durhams, Fat Emmas, and Sweet Caps than anybody ever sold before at this canteen.

The sergeant I spoke to you about tried to teach me to "roll my own," as he so cutely phrased it. When I told him I had never smoked, he wouldn't believe me. He said that such ignorance was pitiful, and I suppose it is, but there is a strict rule that forbids us poor Red Triangleines to smoke, so I shall have to wait till this cruel war is over.

This sergeant is the darlingest boy. He told me the saddest story of his life the other day, when he took me for a spin in his motor-cycle side car. He never had any advantages till he became a prize fighter. He says he learned to know a lot that way. Of course this is shocking to you, but if you lived over here awhile, it would broaden you immensely.

It broadened Mrs. Eby so completely that it flattened her out. Instead of going to the pastor, she had to send for him. He promised to mention Edna in his next Sunday's prayer—the long one in which he catalogued the needs of the congregation and the world in a sort of detailed memorandum to Heaven.

As Edna wrote home, the ladies of Carthage promised to let Lady Keenbrook know that they were just as good as she was. They never dreamed that she had been no better than she should have been!

When, finally, she arrived, they were dazed. They had expected a grandiose and glacial queen-motherly sort of person, resembling the Statue of Liberty, with a lorgnette instead of a torch. They expected her to drop her "h's" and say "Fawncy" and "Doncherknow," for Carthage knew even less about Ladies than about actresses.

Lady Keenbrook turned out to be young and pretty and simple and winsome. She seemed to be even more afraid of the other huttites than they were of her.

As Mrs. Gaddy said to Edna: "She acts like she wanted to giggle at us half the time, and the other half she acts like she wanted to cry her eyes out. She's homesick, likely, to be back with her own kind. I wonder why she left them."

Edna, somehow, was moved to rally to her defense—partly because Edna was good of heart and

partly because everything Mrs. Gaddy said usually inspired Edna to the opposite thought. Edna said:

"I suppose we look kind of funny to her, and that accounts for her snickers, and Lord knows she has right enough to feel sad. My sergeant was telling me he heard that her husband, Lord Keenbrook, was killed early in the war, and then she went to Serbia and was caught in that terrible retreat, and once she rode for eighty-one hours on a horse through the mountains, in snow and ice, with starvation and typhus and panic, and the Serbian government decorated her with the order of some saint or other. I wonder the poor thing lives at all."

Edna somehow could call almost anybody a "poor thing" and make it feel like a caress.

The Carthage group did not get at Lady Keenbrook for the first few days, because she was almost entirely surrounded by generals of all nations and by *liaison* officers—"well named, too," said Miss Cumbers, who was more neglected than in Carthage and had not once been asked to sing twice.

As soon as Lady Keenbrook could shake off her pursuers she came straight to the Carthage women. They were furious at being caught washing dishes—washing dishes, of all things, when their first Lady came along!

Their wrath was changed to astonishment when she picked up a towel and a dish and said:

"I understand that you all come from Carthage."

They tried to be modest about it, but this was hard in view of the manifest fact that Carthage was known at the English court. When they had nodded and flushed, the electric creature said:

"It makes me homesick to hear the very word."

"'Homesick'?"

"Yes. I was born in Missouri, you know."

"No!" "We didn't know!" "Well, did you ever?"

"Oh yes; and as a girl I was always hearing about Carthage. But I left home very early, of course."

"You did?" "Did you?" "You don't say!" "Is that so?"

"You see, I was only seventeen when I went to London."

"Your father and mother took you over, I s'pose?"

"Oh no—no; I went by myself."

"Oh!" "Is that so?" "Oh!" "Oh!"

"You hadn't heard about my experience with the Halls, then?"

"No!" "Yes!" "Well!" "Did you?"

At that tantalizing moment, Lady Keenbrook was called by one of the high boys. She paused just long enough to say:

"I asked to be assigned to an American unit the minute our dear country came into the war. It was a long wait. My God! I almost went mad. But now we're in, and we're going to see it through, aren't we? So glad to be with you all."

She left them statuary about their wash basins—a sort of John Rogers group of homely befuddlement. There were two questions to decide, the latter first: Could a real lady say "My God!" It was finally settled that, while a lady could not, a Lady could. Evidently.

The other question was what she meant by her "experience with the Halls." Mrs. Gaddy said that the Halls were a well-known English family, but Mrs. Shingle insisted that she referred to the castles and

palaces of England, places like the Halls of Parliament and Locksley Hall sixty years after.

They never found out just what Lady Keenbrook did mean, for greater excitements than even the arrival of a Lady from Missouri supervened at once. The last wild German offensive broke, and the Allied line broke with it.

The women of Carthage and the women of all the nations forgot the pettinesses that peace encourages and buckled down to a death-lock with cataclysm. They toiled, heart-broken, back-broken, sleep-broken —everything but spirit-broken. They lost their nerve only when they were told to make ready to move back to the rear.

Edna insulted the colonel who broached the subject. Miss Cumbers, Mrs. Gaddy, and Mrs. Shingle set their arms akimbo and refused to budge. Lady Keenbrook, however, tried her smiles on him and bewitched him into consenting that they should remain.

Grim days of hideous tasks ensued. The canteen work gave place to ghastly labors among the wounded soldiers, the tottering old men and women who could flee no farther, the children who were lost and aghast at the disorder of the world.

Lady Keenbrook did for strange men chores that she would never have asked her maid to do for her. She was as spendthrift of herself in the business of sorrow as she had been aforetime in the business of pleasure. It had been her sin, as it became her salvation, that she could not deny herself to men in an agony of desire or dismay.

In one of her hysterical collapses, after a prolonged vigil among troops dumped out of a hospital train wrecked by a German airship, she told Edna some-

thing of her earlier career, of her life in America, of her visit to England as a chorus girl, of her tour of the provinces, of her meeting with the scampish young Lord Keenbrook.

Their affair had begun viciously; but by some mysterious chemistry of souls the two wastrels redeemed each other. They had just married and settled down to a life of commonplace domesticity when the war called him to his death.

Edna, who had never even dreamed of half the things a city girl overhears, was not shocked at all. Perhaps she could not visualize them. Perhaps she remembered that the Magdalene was nearer to Christ than any other woman. She felt only a deep pity for Lady Letty, and she kept petting her and murmuring, "You poor thing!" till the bitter heart had emptied itself.

Emotion chased emotion out in France, and Edna was permitted to revel in her new knowledge and her postgraduate sympathy only for a day or two, when a vast exultation swept the scene. The Americans were coming up!

The hut at Fargeton was told to make ready to receive one column and refresh it for a day. This would be the last sight the soldiers would have of civilization, for they were approaching the trenches.

The women wrought mightily; sandwiches were built up in steep walls; coffee and chocolate were prepared in gallons; writing paper was heaped high to carry the last messages to many a woman who stayed at home; cigars, cigarettes, and pipe tobacco were piled aloft; the chewing gum that had finally seduced even the French to a new American vice was displayed wholesale.

The exhausted women surveyed their work with a kind of awe. Edna was so fagged that she sobbed.

"All we can do to win the war is to give the boys something for their stomachs and their lungs."

Mrs. Gaddy was fatigue-nasty enough to snip:

"Why don't you hold one of those prayer meetings you were always going to, and save a few souls?"

Edna snapped back:

"Oh, I'm not quite as big a fool as I was when I came over."

"Why, Edna," Mrs. Shingle gasped, "you're not going back on your church teaching, are you?"

"Well, I've learned one thing, and that is that these boys are too busy saving their souls by crucifying their bodies to be bothered by any of my pious notions. They want to laugh, and be excited about something pretty and stunning—something that will take their minds off the hell they're going into."

"The what?" cried Mrs. Gaddy.

"You heard me. I think it's a darn shame we haven't got any actresses here to give them a little real entertainment."

"That's true!" cried Lady Letty. "We simply must get up a show of some sort."

"But what can we do?" Edna sighed. "It takes professionals to make people laugh."

Mrs. Shingle modestly offered herself.

"I might recite for them—some of my lighter pieces."

"But that's only one number," sighed Lady Letty.

"Oh, I know six or seven very droll ones," Mrs. Shingle persisted, ruthlessly.

"You don't dance, too, do you?" said Lady Letty, with a sarcasm that only Mrs. Shingle missed.

"No, I don't. At least, I've never tried to."

"Now, there's nothing like a good swift dance—something wild and fiery and reckless—the boys like such things because they're full of deviltry and grace and—"

Her face was a lamp lighted by an inner flame. The women noted her unusual exaltation, and Mrs. Gaddy mumbled:

"You talk like you could dance, yourself. Why don't you?"

Lady Letty was thrown into a surprising confusion.

"Me? Oh, heavens! I couldn't! Oh no! That would be impossible, quite, quite impossible!"

Edna started to speak, but checked herself. By the time the division's farthest tentacles reached the town the women had got no farther than arranging two groups of numbers each, a, b, and c, by Mrs. Shingle, to be called "In Lighter Vein"; and two groups of songs (three each, a, b, and c) which Miss Cumbers had more or less deftly managed to get invited to render.

They made vain efforts to persuade Lady Letty to do something. She kept shaking her head.

Mrs. Shingle thought that it would please the boys to have a real Lady appear before them.

"We must all do our bits," she urged. "Of course, we can't all do juggling or turn summersets or things like that, but—well, you see what I'm getting at, don't you? And that's why I'm going to recite humorous pieces. You see, don't you?"

"Perfectly," said Lady Letty. "And I think it's very noble of you to sacrifice your audience—yourself, but I just can't find anything to do. These

men are from New York, and they are used to the best. They know too much."

So they left her off the program. But the army seemed to find no fault with her mere presence as she stood watching the column wind through the streets of Fargeton.

The men were footsore, and, for all their jauntiness, they knew that every step took them nearer to the playground of death. They must juggle bayonets before the altar of patriotism. They were draft troops and their training-time had been brief and grilling. Many of them had known little of life but the fast New York phases of it. They had been a motley gang when they marched Fifth Avenue first in their own clothes. They had marched again through Fifth Avenue in uniform, as smart and unified a body as could be. They would march Fifth Avenue a third time with diminished numbers, but with the glory of having gained more ground than almost any other division from America.

The Carthage women saw a part of them just going to their initiation. It was a heart-throttling thing to realize that this one or that one was trudging to his death and those others to cruel wounds and the rest to the enjoyment of immortal glory.

All the women who greeted them loved them and grieved over them with war rapture. But the men's eyes went at once to Lady Letty. They took new life from her smile as if it were a cup of water held out to them as they plodded the desert.

And her beauty rejoiced them mystically as a rose does hanging from a roadside wall.

The other women were thrilled as thoroughly as she and were as ready to toil or to die in the sol-

diers' behalf. But Lady Letty had need only to bloom.

Cabbages are perhaps more useful and reliable than any rose, but the sight of them can never bring the same emotions.

These men going out to a chaos of ugliness wanted with all their souls to have a glimpse of something beautiful and frail and fragrant and a-smile. They did not know their need, perhaps, and some of them were irreverent in their gratitude. But so different men express a poetry that gleams suddenly in their hearts. They rail at it lest they betray a tenderness they cannot distinguish from weakness.

The line plodded by eternally under the leadership of General Alexander, a great soldier and a judge of good literature, as jovial a warrior as ever jested at scars when he felt a wound.

He smiled at the ladies and moved on with his strange army of assorted souls—a captain who was a gifted sculptor, and others who were writers, actors, acrobats, gunmen, clergymen, policemen, fiddlers, clowns, tragedians, and plain laborers.

The division had a famous amusement troupe of its own, later famous as the Argonne Players, and gave brilliant performances in Paris and other cities. But this column was detached from the main body now and bent on most serious business.

Edna kept glancing at Lady Letty, wondering at the secret of her magnetism. She was giving her beauty now, as once before, to passing strangers.

Suddenly, Edna saw her freeze, gasp, whiten, stagger back, and vanish through a door. Edna followed and found her in a chair, her face in her hands, her body shuddering.

Edna pleaded to be allowed to help her, but she shook her head. At last she looked up and faltered:

"I'm all right; a little faint, I guess. Been on my feet too long, probably."

It seemed odd even to Edna to hear a Lady say, "I guess." Her manner was odder still. She laughed no more, but stood up waveringly and went out to greet the soldiers.

She gave them her beauty to witness, but her smile was without illumination.

II

When a detachment had halted and made camp, the men swarmed into the hut and raided it with a German thoroughness. In spite of their weariness, the ladies gave their entertainment that night. Edna described it in a letter.

MOTHER DARLING,—I'm too dog tired to write much. An American army has just settled down upon us, and I'm a wreck. We fed them and drank them and smoked them thoroughly. We even gave them an entertainment—two, in fact. The first one entertained the ladies who gave it, but the poor soldiers, Lord help them!

I haven't the strength to tell you what Belle Cumbers and Mesdames Shingle and Gaddy did to those poor boys. The only good thing about it is that the boys will never fear anything the Huns can do to them. I'd have given my right arm to be Elsie Janis for ten minutes.

We used to speak of comedians as if they were stupid and wicked people who just went about making fools of themselves for money. I tell you they are all scientists and missionaries.

Those soldiers panted for something really clever, as the hart panteth after the water-brooks. One good laugh would have done them more good than all the prayers that could be uttered.

Lady Letty and I were the only ones who didn't inflict anything on the helpless soldiers. I stood off like a mutt, just feel-

ing disgusted; Lady Letty was weeping with pity for the audience.

Well, after it was all over, we learned that the soldiers were to stay one more day and one more night. And what do you suppose these infernal idiots—Mrs. Shingle and Belle Cumbers—proposed to do? They suggested giving the same program all over again so that those of the army who had not been able to get near enough to hear could have another chance!

Well, as soon as it was certain that the men would be with us for twenty-four hours, Lady Letty got busy, and she got the army busy, too.

The next morning the soldiers began to build a big platform. It went up like a mushroom.

My sergeant came along to tell me good-by. He's going forward with the division, and he's so happy he doesn't know what to do. But I'm scared stiff for fear he'll get hurt. It makes an awful difference when somebody you really care for goes in. He had promised me that if he didn't get bumped off he would never go into the prize ring again. So I shall have saved one soul at least, even if I have lost my own heart—

At this point, Edna's mother broke off reading while she tried to faint. Swooning and sneezing, however, will not come at will. She had to be content with telephoning the pastor.

"Edna is going to marry a prize fighter."

This drove even the pastor to profanity.

"Good gracious!" he cursed. "You don't tell me!"

"She writes it right here in the letter. At least she says that if he doesn't get—bumped off, whatever that means, he will never fight again, and that she's saved his soul but lost her heart."

The pastor could be heard ruminating for some time before he answered:

"Well, of course, you must not yield to discouragement. He may get—er—bumped off."

With that slender and somewhat questionable spir-

itual support, Mrs. Eby found strength to read the rest of the letter.

I asked the sergeant what the platform was for, and he said, "The boys are going to pull off a few friendly bouts with the gloves."

Then he asked me if I would ease up on him for just one night and let him off on his promise not to fight again, for there was a guy saying he was the champ of the division and the sergeant didn't want him to go to heaven with any such error on his soul.

Well, of course I protested, but he said he had a wallop up his sleeve that would put that baby to sleep at the first kiss, and he would die unhappy if he couldn't leave it loose for just this only once. So of course I had to give in. And oh, mother, you should have seen him.

It was the first boxing match I ever saw and it was terrible, but, oh, so beautiful; for my darling boy made that would-be champ look like Belle Cumbers reaching for the last high note in "Comin' Through the Rye."

You should have heard those soldiers yell. Oh, mother, I'll bet the Kaiser trembled when the noise reached him.

The rest of the entertainment was one series of knockouts. They got talent from their own men and put over a wonderful show.

They had two gloriously funny female impersonators who did rough stuff and made the soldiers howl. Some of it was pretty raw, and I was glad I was back in the dark, where I could blush. But it was awfully virile. And it got over. That is the main thing in life, mother, whether it's religion or humor—to put your stuff across. I've learned that from the war.

But the triumph of the evening was contributed by my own dear Letty, Lady Letty, you know. She asked me to call her Letty, and she put the crowning touch on the evening with the most beautiful and the noblest deed of self-sacrifice I ever heard of a woman achieving. You see— But there goes the bugle. The army is marching away to the trenches for the great jump-off, and I must run and tell them good-by. I'll tell you all about Lady Letty's sublime deed when I see you. And I think that will be soon, for, now that my sergeant is going to the front, the war won't last much longer. Your loving EDNA.

III

Edna never went back to Carthage and never told her mother just what it was that Lady Letty did. But Mrs. Shingle got home eventually, and this is the substance of what she told:

On the morning after the dire failure of the Carthage trio's venture into the amusement morass, Lady Letty vanished, and was gone all day. Edna and the others searched for her in vain.

They went without her to witness from afar the second entertainment. Mrs. Gaddy was acutely distressed by the vulgarity of the female impersonators. She wondered where such females could be found. They bore not the faintest resemblance to anything female in her ken.

The barker, who barked with the classic intonation of all ballyhoo artists, made the announcement of the last number somewhat as follows:

"La-deeze and gent'men: The Sev'ty-sev'th Dee-veez-yone has the hon-nor of inclewdeen in its array of tal-int none oth-aw than the fa-mis dan-saw, Corporil Teddee Fillmaw. In the good old day-eez of Hammersteen's he had a pawt-neer, a beauti-fool la-dee famil-yar to all New Yaw-kers as Cissee Latour. Yew all re-mem-ba hah as the foist and faw-most ex-po-nint of the dazzleen feat known as the flyeen split.

"This little la-dee left Teddee some yee-urz ago, and he has not seen hah since. By a stroke of that good faw-chewn which will always follow this grand and glawr-yus dee-veez-yone, Miss Cissee Latour happins to be in France and has voluntee-yahd to appee-yah faw tew-night onlee and dew her bit for

your entertainmint. Give the la-dee credit, boys. She's clev-ah."

The applause was thunderous. Many of the soldiers remembered the pert and gracile Cissy, and the rest pretended. But they all expected another burlesque of female impersonation and wondered what runt among them dared to imitate the immortal Cissy.

They recognized Corporal Teddy Fillmore, for his complex foot work had delighted them often, but their riotous uproar was choked off short when he turned to help through the ropes a slight figure too small, too delicate for any soldier's. Few women were built as exquisitely as she, and there was every gracious evidence of womanhood in her contour, her carriage, and the very aura of her presence.

Her face was swathed in a mask of rose-colored chiffon that just did not hide the beauty beneath and just did not reveal it.

There was a curious pathos about her, for all her frivolity of costume. She was plainly afraid, and that endeared her to them, for their ideal was timidity that steels itself for the Cause's sake.

The band struck up an old-fashioned waltz, and Corporal Fillmore, bending to scoop into his arms his tiny confederate, swept her about the platform in long swoops and dips and swirls. He flung her from him spinning and caught her outflung hand to draw her back into the vortex of his own rhythm. For the finish of the dance he clasped her in his arms, and followed the standard pattern of the waltz in a dreamy revolution of a somehow solemn beauty.

Edna, watching her, felt tears on her eyelids, and thought of the hymns she had meant to teach.

There was something hymnal now in the very grace of this ritual.

The dance ended. The dancers paused, bowing on all sides to the tumultuous but respectful homage of the throng. The soldiers felt love in their hearts for little Miss Latour, panting with the velocity of her unwonted efforts. She had given them, perhaps, their last look at the supernal charm of young womanhood deploying all its beauties in the music of flesh.

But this was not all of Miss Latour's largess to them. At a nod from Fillmore the band flared up in insolent ridicule of the tender moods it had just expressed. Brass roared and wood wind whooped; drums shivered and gongs knocked.

Now Miss Latour laid aside her thoughts of grace and pathetic loveliness. She kicked high and low, this way and that; her feet sought the zenith and the nadir at once. She flung her sweet head back and smote it with the palm of her upflung foot.

She taunted her partner, dodged him, gave him patterns of cloggy steps to copy. She pranced like a pouter pigeon. She toddled on her toe points. She let him swing her about through the air like a torch, and she emitted whoops of reckless laughter.

At length Fillmore caught her at the waist and hoisted her high. One of her feet went higher. The other thrust downward, and she struck six o'clock.

Then he swept her through the air and brought her to earth in a sidelong swoop, whose very curve gladdened the soul somehow.

He let her go, but she did not rest on her feet. She went to earth in a nine-fifteen posture, on a horizontal plane.

Fillmore stamped his foot in a dancer's wrath.

He tried to lift her. But she would not obey. She slipped back like a broken puppet into that divided attitude. The soldiers yelped with laughter.

Fillmore grew more indignant. He caught her under the arms and circled the stage, stepping across her body, where it spun with the toes at the hub of the wheel.

Finally, in sheer rage, he lifted her to her feet, imbued her with his own frenzy. They danced with a mad furiousness, too fleet for the eye to follow. Their feet outrolled the frantic drummer's clatter.

As the band rallied to the wild climax of its jazz, Teddy hurled his partner from him in disdain. The men gasped as she darted through the air, her feet dispread like a hurdler's.

She came down so, and struck the platform as if split apart.

There was a gasp of fear. Then they saw that she was bending her pretty head, tapping her knee cap with her forehead in a mockery of faint homage.

The soldiers tore the night to pieces with their applause. Fillmore lifted Miss Latour to her feet, and she took the homage with much throwing of kisses. They could not see her mystic face, but, from the agitation of her pretty shoulders, they judged that she was crying.

Fillmore spoke to her. She hesitated, then nodded weakly. He went to the ropes and asked the band for a reprise of the last of the music.

The band renewed the clamor at its wildest. Fillmore seized that dainty morsel of bravery in his arms, repeated the insanity of the dance, and tossed her away again with prodigal indifference to her fate.

She landed again with the flying split. And, now

that the soldiers knew that she could not be hurt, they raised a pandemonium, a superpandemonium, for suddenly they saw her face unveiled.

As she left his arms for the last time, a button on Teddy's sleeve caught in her chiffon mask and ripped it loose.

The soldiers saw that Cissy Latour was as beautiful as she was graceful and gallant.

The ladies from Carthage saw that she was Lady Letitia Keenbrook.

IV

And this was the deed that Edna called sublime! The most beautiful and the noblest self-sacrifice!

Lady Letty, who had climbed the stairs of social prestige so slowly, so painfully, slid down the banisters, hunted up her old partner, and did the split to please the soldiers. And Edna approved!

Mrs. Shingle told everybody in Carthage all about her one experience with a capital Lady. And what she said of Edna would have filled a book.

Poor Mrs. Eby stayed indoors for weeks. The parson took upon himself the blame for the loss of Edna's soul, for what else could he call the sea change that had transformed the demure and sedate little Edna that Carthage had intrusted to the war?

The backsliding of Edna was more appalling than the apart-sliding of a dozen Ladies Letty.

Mrs. Eby never showed anybody the rest of her letters from Edna. One of the worst of them ran as follows:

The Lord evidently meant Lady Letty to be a dancer, otherwise why should He have given her such pretty legs and such limber joints?

I don't suppose she dances much the way that Miriam and David did, but times change, and the Bible tells us to be all things to all men.

Anyway, Lady Letty is going back to the stage after the war. She left it to marry a nobleman, and she grew ashamed of her past and tried to hide it. But the war came and demanded of her her gift, as it demanded of everybody his or her utmost, and she gave it. That's the main thing—to sacrifice yourself for others.

This has been a lesson to me, I tell you. I was always planning to save people by telling them their duty and trying to lift them to nobler thoughts. I never got much of anywhere except to build up my own pride and make me think I was closer to God than anybody and had a special billet in heaven. Now I realize that just making people happier is doing them about as much good as anybody can. Life is so short and so dangerous and so terribly sad that the fun makers and the beauty makers are real filanthropists.

I'm not graceful or beautiful. I can't sing or act or tell funny stories. I can't dance and do clever things like Lady Letty can, but there's one thing I do know a lot about now, and that's tobacco. And after what I've seen of the gratitude people feel if you'll only slip them a cigar or a cigarette when they need it, I don't see any higher mission than running a smoke store. I don't want to smoke any myself, because it's like taking food from the hungry.

Over here the government shops, where they sell *tabac*, as they call it, are mostly run by women. So when I come home I'm going to open a cigar-and-cigarette emporiam in New York with my sergeant for pardner.

I forgot to tell you that we got engaged just before he went out to battle. If he comes back, we'll be married. He has an uncle who owns a tobacco farm in Connecticut, and he says we can get our Havana fillers there. My sergeant says awfully funny things.

But he can be in earnest, too, and though we expect to begin modestly, we hope, some day, to have a big importing business of our own. I hope you'll like this, because I remember how grandma used to enjoy her pipe after a hard day's washing.

So you see everything has its compinsations, after all. It isn't all wasted. The war brought Lady Letty back to the stage,

and it has shown me the way to a life of real usefulness and comfort to others in the tobacco field. This war certainly is broadening.

I wish dear Doctor Swanton could marry us, but since he can't come over here for that, please ask him to pray for Tim's safe return and for our success in the tobacco business.

Mrs. Eby never delivered this message, and Doctor Swanton never prayed for the prize fighter's return to safety.

Perhaps that was why Sergeant Tim did not come back entirely. He left on the battlefield the hand that carried the lovely wallop.

But, as Edna wrote home, everything has its "compinsations," for her husband was never tempted to leave the blissful haven of the tobacco shop and return to the prize ring.

Edna's latest letter contained these significant words:

My Tim says the prize ring for him is the plain gold band on my thoid finger—he says it that way, like all born New Yorkers do. I'm getting to talk that way myself. Tim says the funniest things. I tell you a sense of humor certainly—I mean soitainly —helps you in this woild.

Business in the shop is growing all the time in spite of the fact that I can't wait on customers any more now. But I did go to see Lady Letty's first reappearance on the stage. She's gone back to "Latour" on the billboards. It's "Mrs. Fillmore" off the stage. But she'll always be Lady Letty to me.

In fact, Tim says unless we have to name the baby "Tim," after him, we'll name it "Letty," after her. You won't mind, will you, mother? We'll name the next one after you.

Mrs. Eby says nothing, but sews fast at garments which, fortunately, will fit either a Timmy or a Letty, as the case may be.

IX

A STORY I CAN'T WRITE

THIS is my first appearance as one of those authors who step out in front of the curtain and talk about themselves instead of letting the characters do their own talking; but, frankly, I don't know how to tell this story. I am sure that there is a real story here, for when I heard it it stirred me deeply, and two other men with me.

But simply to transcribe a man's rambling conversation is no way to make a work of art out of a handful of life.

The difference between a story and a narrative seems to be about the same as that between a lump of potter's clay and a finished design. Life should be rolled on the wheel till it takes shape and polish and carries as well the style of the potter.

There are thousands of possible shapes, from little tear jars that may be carried in the bosom, to great platters that will carry a garnished boar's head or a peacock in full uniform.

Be the design what it may, it should hold water or something, begin somewhere, end somewhere, exploit an idea, and reveal a constructive purpose apart from the virtue of the material. This story might be handled a hundred ways, and I have tried a dozen forms, but none of them seems to be able to contain it entire. What is appropriate to one phase is in-

adequate to another. It is hard to combine a domestic vessel with a chalice.

A story may conceal a moral, but it ought to point it very vaguely, if at all. Or, moral-less soever, if it whiles away an otherwise stupid, lonesome hour, it has achieved something fine.

If it only gently massages the heart, or soothes it as with a familiar tune, or takes it back home, or sends it off about its own imaginings, it does well.

This story, properly made, could do any or all of these things, but it stumps me. How can I finish it who cannot even begin it?

I had thought of combining a bright, picturesque, and homely atmosphere with the Horatian canon of commencing in the middle, thus:

Her feet on the ladder were neither small nor shapely nor yet prettily shod, but he hoped that the rest of her might prove more charming as she backed down to earth again from the russet-and-gold-starred green firmament of the apple tree.

The arm that next appeared held up a gingham apron to bring along a heap of apples chosen from this tree of the Hesperides.

But the arm was not young, nor the bosom that followed. The pathos of age was in the throat, and the face that came down last was weather-wrung and sorrow-beaten, yet very kind withal. And to the waiting stranger it was blessed with the aureole of kinship. He knew the woman instantly for one of his own people. And as she turned her head and glanced to see who stood at the ladder's foot, she stared with a terror of recognition, gave a little cry, and let her apron go. The apples drummed on the ground and bounced about the grass as she called:

"Tommy Farley! It's you!"

"Yes."

She ran and hugged the man no longer young, as if he were still a child, and laughed.

"Oh, I'd know you anywhere by your mother's eyes!"

He drew away from her coldly, and demanded:

"Where is my mother? Why didn't she ever come back to find me?"

The old woman's smile turned to a grimace of ancient pain, and she said:

"That's a strange story, Tommy Farley."

But by the time I had got thus far, I felt that I was on the wrong road. It seemed intolerably awkward to turn time back on its creaking hinges by the rickety machinery of oldfangled authors. Besides, there was no significance to the story. It had no thesis, no concept to exploit. It was just an empty narrative of something odd that happened to certain people.

It seemed advisable to announce a text and illustrate it. So this began to spread itself on the sheet:

What is freedom, and what is happiness? These are more vital questions than even Pilate's "What is truth?" which he asked, "and would not stay for an answer"—knowing, no doubt, that there is none.

But a certain man, very much of the twentieth century, looking like a cartoon of success, and most luxuriously ensconced in the drawing-room of the Pullman car, was saying to his equally prosperous companions:

"I never was really happy or really free except when I was five years old and my mother lost me and never found me. I sold newspapers and blacked boots and slept in an alley. I was free then, and happy—till I froze my feet after two years of being my own master."

This beginning would manifestly never do, with its pomposity, its philosophical quality, and its thinly disguised attempt to startle. If one is going to be literary, he might as well go the whole hog. So I made another start, with a frank allegory set at the head, like one of those poems Sir Walter Scott and Kipling and others quoted, or wrote to quote:

As God was going along a lonely road one day, he met a little girl carrying a lighted candle and a pitcher of water.

And God stopped her and said:

"Whither are you bound, my child, and why do you carry the pitcher and the candle?"

And the little girl replied:

"With the candle I intend to set fire to heaven, and with the pitcher of water I shall put out the fires of hell."

God smiled and said—

Plainly this was too formidable. There is no real art or friendship in killing off the reader before the story has a chance. Such a beginning would be like shouting "Fire!" in a theater just as the overture starts. There would be no audience left for the play.

A love interest is supposed to be necessary to fictional success, though it is amazing how many immensely prosperous stories have got along famously without any.

Still, it might be worth while to bait the hook with one of these glittering minnows:

As big, handsome Tom Farley gazed at the beautiful girl whom he looked upon as the fairest prize among all his ambitious dreams—and such a prize; young, exquisite, intellectual, aristocratic, the adored of all adorers, the idolized daughter of wealth, besought by men of title and power—he thought to himself: "Though she seems to be not altogether indifferent to my attentions, and although I can offer her a position in life not inferior to her own proud station, what would she say, what would her haughty parents say, if they knew by what devious ways I have arrived at success? Would she consent to be mine if I told her just who I am? Indeed," he pondered, with a strange smile, "I cannot tell her who I am, for I do not know."

This is plainly contemptible. In sheer desperation I made a try at beginning at the last place on earth

one expects or desires a story to begin—the beginning. Hence this:

The five-year-old boy in the deserted railroad station tried to remember that big men do not blubber.

But the hours had been long since his mother left him on the bench and made him promise not to move till she came back from the few moments' shopping that she must do before they resumed their journey. The few minutes had dragged into an hour, two hours, five, ten. Hunger, fear, dismay, had tormented him in turn and all together.

And now the station master had closed the ticket window and put out the light in his office. He was about to blow out the last dreary coal-oil lamp in the waiting room when he discovered the lonely child.

He whistled, "Whew!" and chirped, "Hello, there!" and shuffled over to ask questions.

But the boy knew no answers to any questions except his name, which was "Tommy Farley, sir." He did not know the town he came from, for he had been in many towns. He did not know the name of the town he was in. He did not know the town he was bound for, if it was a town. He had been told that his father was there, a soldier, wounded in a big battle, and needing his mother's and his son's help.

That was the extent of his information, except as to his appetite, his fear, and his wild longing for his mother's arms. He confessed that he had run away from her once or twice and been mighty glad to get back. But she had never run away from him before.

The station master screwed up his face. This was not the first child that had been abandoned there. Strange people on strange errands for strange motives flowed through that building or tarried between trains.

This commencement is not so bad, but it has all the irritating earmarks of a mystery story with the solution withheld, like an orange behind the back, while the reader is teased on and on to the point of rage.

This story does not belong in any of these galleries,

and I am in despair of handling it at all as either a work of high art or a time whiler or even a pot boiler.

Yet it seems a pity to deny it to you just because I cannot make it wieldy. And I am tempted to give up trying, to cease the loathsome obtrusion of the first person, and frankly turn the raw material over to you. Perhaps you or somebody else can make a story of it.

Browning, finding at an old bookstall the report of an ancient murder trial, offered it to Hawthorne and to others as material for a novel or what not, but, having offered it in vain with no takers, took it and made of it one of the most marvelous of human achievements, *The Ring and the Book*.

Hopeless of any such accomplishment, I publish to whoso wants it this record of an American life as the man who lived it told it piecemeal more or less reluctantly to a few casual acquaintances that shared with him a drawing-room on an afternoon express from Washington to New York. The words are not exact, but nearly, for they impressed us, and I made notes of them soon after.

Mr. Thomas J. Farley (to give him another name) had been with the President that morning, and had seen him go to the united Houses of Congress and deliver his farewell address before he sailed for France and the Peace Conference.

He described the astonishing spectacle of the President standing before the blended Senators and Representatives, one-half of whom rose and applauded, one-half of whom kept their seats in silent resentment.

The talk drifted from the scene to the late war, and Mr. Farley wondered if his son would ever come

back alive or not, for the vast and belated casualty lists and the mountains of undelivered mail might leave him in doubt for months.

It was this that wrung from his aching heart the bitter reflection:

"I've been successful, I suppose. I've made money and had friends, and I've been doing my bit in a high position at the capital, and yet I never was really happy or really free except when I was five years old and my mother lost me and never found me. I sold newspapers and blacked boots and slept in an alley. I was free then, and happy—till I froze my feet after two years of being my own master."

Having said this, he relapsed into silence, staring off through the window into space or into his own past and his lost paradise.

But we were piqued by such an odd situation and we asked questions, eliciting answers that led to more questions and answers, the net result being about as follows, if you will omit the freight of quotation marks and imagine that Mr. Farley is speaking:

I never knew who I was or where I came from till I was thirty-five years old. I knew my name, because a child is usually taught that first, so that he can tell it to anybody who finds him when he is lost.

But all I knew was my name. My mother had started South to find my father. He was a soldier in the Union army, and she got word that he was lying wounded in a hospital.

In those days, Cincinnati was the biggest city in the country west of New York and Philadelphia—bigger than Chicago, St. Louis, any of those cities. It was during the Civil War, and the town was

packed with soldiers going and coming, relatives, contractors, war workers, nurses, crooks, spies—all sorts of people.

My mother had to change trains there after a long wait. It was very hot, and she said she didn't want to take me out in the sun. She had to buy some things—I don't remember what they were, but she left me on a bench in the waiting room with an apple and some cookies and told me she'd be back soon.

I never saw her again.

At midnight the station agent shut up shop and took me home with him. The next day he started out to find what had happened to my mother. There was no trace of her, no explanation. Nobody had a theory, even, or, if anybody did, I was too young to know what the theory was.

The station master was kind to me and I sat in the station all day, hoping my mother would come back or send some word. People made a little hero of me and were very sympathetic; but after four or five days I became an old story.

The station agent didn't mean to be heartless, but he had children and troubles of his own. Everybody had troubles of his own. They gave me up as hopeless.

There I was, a five-year-old boy, alone in that city, without a friend. I was scared, hungry, and about as unhappy as anybody could be.

I wandered all over the city, asking for news of my mother or for help. And didn't get it. I'd go up to a man and say:

"Please, mister, I've lost my mother. I've got no father. I—"

And he would move on or poke a dime at me. Women were the same. Nobody paid any attention to me. It sounds funny, but it was true. And it wasn't that people were heartless. They had troubles of their own. They'd been fooled by too many little beggars and sniveling newsboys. Some of them would take a ten-cent chance on being fooled and would toss me a dime. But they wouldn't stop and listen or lend me a hand.

I don't know where I slept or where I went the first few days, but one day when I was standing on the street, crying my eyes out, a newsboy came up to me and asked me what was the matter. I told him, and he said:

"You come along with me. I got a good place to live, and I make good money, and I need a partner. I'll set you up in business with a shoe box."

I went along with him, and there my happiness began, for I led a life of industry and prosperity. If the day was bright I got a lot of boots to black, and ate three big meals. If it happened to be muggy, business was bad and I didn't eat so much.

I slept in an old piano box, in an old shed, up a back alley. Nobody told me when to get up. Nobody made me go to school, or wash my neck, or do this or not do that, or told me when to go to bed, or who to play with. I was my own master and I hadn't a worry on earth.

Now I have my home, my children, my money affairs, responsibilities, politics, sickness—I don't know whether my boy will ever come back from France. Everything worries me now, but then—

I learned one thing—how to memorize. The boy who helped me out—Poke Swinton—was a very good

boy and very religious. He went every Sunday to a mission. I was too lazy, but he would come back and repeat to me what he had heard. There was a queer old preacher there who talked in parables. One of them I remember just as Poke told it to me.

As God was going along a lonely road one day, he met a little girl carrying a lighted candle and a pitcher of water.

And God stopped her, and said:

"Whither are you bound, my child, and why do you carry the pitcher and the candle?"

And the little girl replied:

"With the candle I intend to set fire to heaven, and with the pitcher of water I shall put out the fires of hell."

God smiled, and said:

"Foolish child! would you, even if you could, destroy both the abode where the virtuous enter into bliss and the place of torment for the guilty?"

"Yes," said the child.

"But wherefore," God asked, "and to what purpose?"

And the girl replied:

"I would destroy both heaven and hell, so that men should learn to do the right without hope of reward or fear of punishment."

There were a lot of other parables, and there were the war extras, and all the big doings of the time. I was happy as a king ought to be, only that kings have responsibilities and duties, and people to tell them what to do. But I hadn't. I was well and strong and I didn't know what trouble was till the second year. That was a bitter winter, and my feet froze. I say now that I was happy then, but of course I had my ups and downs. The way I froze my feet proves that.

In the second winter in the alley I took notice of the shops at Christmas-time, and on Christmas Eve,

as Poke and I were wandering up and down the streets we came to a Sunday-school celebration.

Crowds of children were going in, and Poke and I went along. There was a Christmas tree loaded down with gifts, and a Santa Claus, and little girls in white to carry the presents to the children as the names were called.

The superintendent announced that there was a present for every good child. So I was convinced that there was one for me, for I had been a good boy, and I knew it.

Well, they took the presents off the tree and read the names. "Johnny Jones." A boy would pop up and get his pair of skates, or his knife, or whatever it was. "Susie Brown." A little girl would pop up and get her doll, or whatever she got.

Well, it went on that way for an hour, and I expected every next name to be mine. But they stripped the tree at last and there was nothing for me and Poke. Every child there got something but us two.

So we went back to our alley. It was bitter cold and I was crushed with disappointment. In spite of my six years and my independence, I shuffled along through the snow, crying like a baby.

Poke tried to console me. He said:

"Aw, I don't believe that was the real Santa Claus at all. I've always heard that Santa Claus comes down the chimbly, and you hang up your stockin's, and he puts something in."

"Have you? Does he?" I sniffled; and my hopes blossomed out again.

That night, instead of sleeping in my stockings as usual, I hung them up on the edge of the box I slept

in. And Christmas morning I found Santa Claus had left me a pair of frozen feet. There was nothing in the stockings but the same old holes.

I didn't suffer so very much from my feet till the first warm days of spring, and then they felt as if iron claws were tearing them to pieces.

I was standing on a corner one day, crying with the pain, lifting one foot and then another, and going nearly crazy. Everybody went by without bothering even to ask what I was crying about, till finally one tall, solemn man stopped, and said:

"My son, why are thee crying?"

"Because me feet was froze," I said.

"Why does thee not go home to thy father and mother?" says he.

"Because I 'ain't got none," says I.

Then, instead of walking on, he heard me out, and said:

"Will thee come with me?"

He took me to a Quaker mission for orphans, and my feet were taken care of by a doctor, and I was put into the first bed I had slept in for two years. The people were kind to me, and by and by an old farmer came to the mission and asked if I would come with him and be his son.

I said, "You bet!" and he adopted me. His name was Jemison and he was a mighty good man. He took me out to his big farm in Indiana and I lived on the fat of the land. I worked hard in the fields, early and late, but I had good food and loving care, and I grew big and strong.

The home was very religious, and I had to quit swearing and chewing tobacco. We went to the meeting house and sat there in quiet meditation;

hardly anybody ever spoke at all. At the end of the silent service Pa Jemison would rise up and lead us home.

Of course the Jemisons were Quakers and they hated war, but right through the middle of their farm ran the state road and I used to watch the people go by. The Civil War was ended, but still it was all uniforms, uniforms. Political parades would march through, and torchlight processions, and nearly everybody in old uniforms—officers on prancing horses, crippled men in carriages, but it was soldiers everywhere, and brass bands playing march songs.

I used to run to the fence to watch the uniforms go by. I got a great ambition to be a soldier.

When I was fourteen I read about the appointment of cadets to West Point, and one day when I was in town with pa I sneaked off and talked to a Congressman and told him my ambition. He smiled and said my education was hardly sufficient for me to pass the entrance examinations. He told me what I ought to study.

I went back and set to work on mathematics and grammar and history. Pa was glad to see me apply myself of evenings, but of course I never told him what I was working for.

A year or so later I read that competitive examinations for West Point were going to be held in town the next day. I stole a horse early in the morning and lit out for town. I found the place and told the new Congressman about my life and my ambition to be a soldier. And I took the examination.

I got home about midnight, put up the horse, and

tried to sneak into the house, but pa was waiting for me.

"Where has thee been?" he says, and I says:

"Oh, I got tired of work and I just went to town for a good time. I'm back now, though."

He didn't whip me, as I expected he would, but he just said:

"If thee had asked me for a horse thee should have had it, for thee works hard and has a right to a little pleasure, if it be honest pleasure. But thee was wrong to leave us without a word. All day we have feared for thee and searched everywhere for thee lest some harm had befallen thee. Go to bed now, but never again be so cruel with those that love thee."

That hurt worse than a whipping and I felt mighty mean. A few days after that there was a letter for me, the first one I ever had. It was from the Congressman and it said I had won the competition and the appointment to the Military Academy.

I don't think I even passed the examinations, but they took an interest in me. Well, I had to tell pa this, and I gave him the letter and told him I had lied when I said I went to town for a good time. I said I wanted to be a soldier. He read the letter and looked very sad, and then he said:

"My son, when thee was a little child thy mother abandoned thee. Who took thee in and gave thee a home and love and care and religious teaching?"

"Thee did, pa," I said.

"Thee knows that we are Friends; that we hate war and all the works thereof, that we abhor the thought of its blood and butchery and unchristian cruelty. And now our own son would be a soldier, would learn to shoot and to kill and make that his

business. Thee has no right to desert us who never deserted thee. My son, do not do this—this ungodly thing."

"All right, pa," I said, "I won't."

It hurt. I had a soldier's blood in me. My father was a soldier, my son is a soldier, and I wanted to be one.

But I gave it up. It broke my heart, but I felt I had no right to break the hearts of the people who had given me the only love I had ever known.

I stayed on the farm for years. Then I decided to be a lawyer. I studied in the office of the Congressman who offered me the appointment and was admitted to the bar, and I moved away to another state, where I built up a fair practice. But politics interested me, and finally I became the chairman of the State Committee of my party.

A reporter interviewed me and asked about my parents, and I told him I hadn't any or didn't know what had become of them. He wrote quite a piece about it, and it was copied all over the country.

One day I got a telegram from Freneau, New York. It said:

> I am your mother's sister. Please communicate.
>
> CLARA SHULL.

I communicated with the first train east. When I got to Freneau I asked about the Shulls. I was told they lived on a farm just north of town.

There was no hack at the station, and I walked out, trying to remember the village; but I couldn't recall anything about it. Finally I saw a farmhouse and felt that it must be the place. The doors and windows were open, but there was nobody at home.

I heard voices in the orchard, though, and I walked out there.

Nobody was to be seen, but there were ladders up the trees and feet on the ladders, and people talking to one another as they picked the apples.

As I came near a woman backed down a ladder. She had an apronfull of apples. She turned her head and caught sight of me. She let her apron go and the apples fell to the ground. She came hurrying after them, and she said:

"You're Tommy Farley! I'd know you anywhere by your mother's eyes."

She ran to hug me, but I was angry. All my childhood loneliness came back on me, and I kept her away while I said:

"Where is my mother and why didn't she ever come back for me when she left me in the station?"

"Oh, my poor boy, she had a sunstroke in the street and was taken to a hospital and died there without ever saying a word."

I put my arms round my aunt then, and cried and cried. I was a hard old politician of thirty-five, but I wept myself out. Then I grew hot again, and I said:

"Why didn't you ever look for me? You were her sister."

She sighed.

"My husband was what they called a 'copperhead,' and we were driven out of the state. We went to Canada and stayed till after the war. We couldn't get word, and afterward, when we were allowed to come back to this country, my husband went to Cincinnati to bring your mother's body home from the Potter's Field.

"They had learned her name from some papers in her handbag, but they didn't know of her boy. Cincinnati was in a terrible state then, and the hospitals were overcrowded. And when my husband asked for you you were hopelessly lost. The years went on and on till, the other day, we happened to read your story in the paper, and I telegraphed you right away."

"And I came right away," I said. "But my father—why didn't he look for me?"

"He died of his wounds."

Well, it was kind of pitiful to be so alone, but it helped some to find that I was human and hadn't "just growed." When we were quieted down a little my aunt said:

"But what's that 'J' in your name? The paper calls you 'Thomas J. Farley.'"

"I took that name from Pa Jemison," I said. And then I had to tell her all about him.

Did I ever hear from Poke Swinton again? Funny thing about that. A few years ago I was out West with a group of big railroad men, including old Jake Walker.

We were standing in the lobby of a big hotel when somebody tapped me on the shoulder. I turned and saw a big, strapping giant smiling at me. He said:

"You don't know me, do you?"

I had to say: "I can't just recall you at the moment."

He said: "Well, you slept with me for two years."

"Poke Swinton!" I shouted, and nearly wrung his hand off.

"What are you doing with those fellers?" he said.

"Oh, I'm out on a little railroad business."

"Well, you steer clear of that gang. Old Jake Walker will steal every cent you've got. Have you got any?"

"Not much," I said.

"I tell you what you do. I got a nice safe business here, and I'll take you in as a partner."

He took me out to his place. He had a wholesale business in barbers' supplies and begged me to come in with him.

I told him I couldn't, and I told Jake Walker what Poke said of him. Old Jake laughed himself sick and insisted on seeing the store. Poke showed him round, and old Jake was very complimentary, but Poke said:

"Well, I can't take back much of what I said."

And Jake laughed again.

A couple of years ago I was taken suddenly ill in Pittsburgh. I went to the hospital, and stayed there for months—like to have died. My wife and daughter came to be with me.

It got into the papers that I was ill there, and one day a letter came from Poke. It said he had read that I was sick in hospital and he guessed I was probably broke. He had saved up in his lifetime thirty-six hundred dollars, and he inclosed me a check for half of it. I could have the rest of it if I wanted it.

Well, I read the letter and looked at that check for eighteen hundred dollars, and I cried. And my wife read it and she cried, and my daughter read it and—well, we had a great old cry.

I wouldn't for worlds have written Poke that I

was independent of his fatherly anxiety, so I wrote him that I was just as much obliged, but I had enough money to pay my doctors' bills and the hospital charges, and I had a job waiting for me when I got well, so I asked him to keep the money till I really needed it, and sent it back. I hated to do it, too, because I knew Poke wanted to feel that he still had to take care of me just as much as when he was a little newsboy and found me crying on the street for my lost mother.

Well, that's my story. I've succeeded in life after a fashion, I suppose. I've got a wife and a daughter, and a son who's a soldier. I'm here in Washington in a big position, and I guess I'm what could be called a successful man. But I'm worried all the time about something, and now it's wartimes again and my boy is in France. He may be lost somewhere, as my father was and as I was.

So that's why I say I was never really free or really happy except when I was a five-year-old newsboy without a home or parents or anything— Here's Philadelphia. Let's get out and stretch our legs.

But at Philadelphia we others had to stop off for a banquet, and we left him to continue his journey. We wanted to ask about his love story, for he must have had one, with that wife, that doubtless beautiful daughter, and that heroic son.

But his train would not wait.

And now you have the story as I had it. There seems to me to be a lot in it, a lot of American life and significance. But as for telling it properly—I repeat, it is too much for me.

X

THE BUTCHER'S DAUGHTER

I

ONLY those who know the agonies of village aristocracy in a land where it is unconstitutional to hint at inequalities can fathom the heart of poor Mrs. Milligrew when she learned to what depths love had dragged the lad who had but yesterday, it seemed, slid out of her lap, never to climb back again.

Nettie Milligrew was a born party goer and party giver, and she glowed with pride when her son announced his intention to attend the Congregationalist sociable on Mrs. Budlong's lawn. She squealed with delight when he growled that he maybe might take a girl p'raps. But, as she said to her husband afterward, "Oh, the horrow of it when he told me who he wanted to take!"

She had wasted on the solemn little rascal for his encouragement one of those smiles of approval that she ordinarily saved for callers—one of her very best-dressed smiles. She had even called him by his complete name, not the usual "Ronnie."

"I am delighted to hear it, Ronald," she scintillated, "and I shall be very glad to give you the money for the refreshments. But whom is the little girl you are going to take?" Mrs. Milligrew almost never used "whom" except at receptions.

This simple question produced an astounding effect on Ronald. He began to roll his eyeballs as if they itched, as if he were trying to scratch them on his eyelids, to scour the entire inside of his head with his tongue. He twisted in what looked like a violent effort to roll himself up in himself spirally, as one makes lamplighters.

"Stop it!" his mother cried. "And answer me this minute!"

When, at length, he answered, she was influenced to an activity almost the reverse of his. She opened out. Her mouth changed from a fallen brace (⁀) to an upper-case O, while her eyes became two capital Q's—Q and Q—and her hands went up flatly in an Egyptian amazement. Yet all the boy had answered was the name of a little girl.

"Josie."

"Josie whom? I don't know any Josies."

"Josie Mullett."

"Not the Metropolitan Market man?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"But she's—he's— You don't mean the butcher —not his daughter?"

"Yes, ma'am; you bet, ma'am!"

"But, my child—really— Oh dear what's to become of us?"

Mrs. Milligrew was thinking of more than the immediate tragedy. She had never forgotten how her own mother had opposed her own marriage to Eben L. Milligrew, a mere butter-and-eggist. She often reminded her husband of this.

Mrs. Milligrew's mother's grandmother had been a Digney, one of the lumber Digneys. But she had run away with the son of the Mitnick family; she

had descended from the sawmill Digneys to the windmill Mitnicks. And her daughter had committed the *lapsus familiæ* of wedlock with the Pruddens, who were in coal and wood, and her daughter had drifted on down to butter and eggs. And now her son—as if perfecting an evil destiny—wanted to go on into meats, poultry, and fresh fish.

Really, it seemed to be the doom of this family to be forever marrying beneath itself.

It was time to stop right here. Mrs. Milligrew amazed her son by the ferocity of her behavior.

"No; you cannot, you must not, you shall not!" she stormed. "I will not give you a penny for any such foolishness."

Ronald mumbled.

"I got m' own money saved up from mow'n' the grass all summer."

"It makes no difference what you've saved from what. Why, her people don't even go to our church, do they?"

"No'm. Josie goes to the Unineted Presberturrian, like her folks does."

"So, they're not even Presbyterians! Mere U.P.'s. Why, you sha'n't go; you simply sha'n't! Understand me once for all."

"But I've already ast her, and she said she would."

This was more desperation than defiance, but, to his mother, it was rebellion. It drove her to her most awful threat.

"Well, I shall have to speak to your father about it when he comes home from the store to-night. He probably won't let you go at all, and if you're not careful he will give you a good whipping."

To irate mothers, all threatened whippings are good; and some are better than others.

Ronald dropped the subject and vanished into some sulking place.

Mrs. Milligrew, like the dutiful wife she was, usually managed to meet her husband at the top step with a daily household trouble that knocked out of his mind any worries he may have brought home with him from the shop. This night, having sold an unexpected number of gross of eggs, he brought home, as a well-earned extravagance, a little pasteboard pail of oysters.

Mrs. Milligrew, as other Mid-Westerners do, looked upon an oyster as an exotic luxury like an artichoke or an ortolan but, this evening she caught sight of the label on the tiny bucket:

FROM METROPOLITAN MARKET
BY JOSEPH MULLETT
OYSTERS R IN SEASON

She was so bemocked by the coincidence that she almost threw the oysters away—almost.

She held up the container as if it contained poison, and used it as the text of her grievance for the day. But when she had proclaimed the social cloud that overcast her sky, Eben Milligrew just laughed.

"Aw, shucks! Let the kid alone. He's got to have it like the mumps and measles. The other kids will cure him of any such foolishness. If he shows up with a girl, she'll go home alone, or I'm no prophet."

He had his way, but not his prophecy. For Ronald's passion was so dire that it survived every ordeal in a long series of ordeals.

II

Getting dressed was the first torment. Ronald scrubbed that unseen hinterland, the back of his own neck. He twisted a washcloth in his own ears. He lambasted his hair with a brush till his scalp tingled and his cowlick was almost cowed. He even made a painful effort to disturb the ancient dregs beneath his finger nails.

He put on his new shoes; so tight they were, too, that they made him feel as if he had no feet at all, just wooden stumps full of toothache. He sweated an Eton collar on his neck and worried a new tie into a state of irremediable senility.

When he was all harnessed he was afraid to brave the front door. He went out through the kitchen and the back gate, gingerly up the rubbishy alley, and along Blondeau Street like an escaping thief.

There was no way, though, of reaching the Mulletts' homely home without going through the whistling front gate, and the evening was not yet dark enough to conceal him.

Besides, there was the notorious Mullett dog to negotiate. Ronald could not tell whether the dog did not know him in his disguise or was overjoyed by his elegance; for the beast barked and bounced round him, alternately threatening him with the slobbery fangs of wrath and the muddy paws of affection. Ronald was not sure which he feared the more. He dodged the animal and kept it off by violent gestures and fierce commands to "Git away from here, naow!" He rang the bell backward while he faced the dog.

Josie came to the door herself, and said, "Hello,

Ronnie!" in a voice of awe. She was in a state of supreme preparedness—as slick and pink and frilly as a girl in a valentine.

Her mother, realizing that she was going into society, had wrought upon her and her get-up as if her raiment were a trousseau. Her frock was as simple and fashionable a garment as would be expected of a butcheress. Ronnie had a startled notion that Josie was dressed in a mass of that scalloped paper that hung from the butcher's ceiling as a paradise for flies, to lure them from the wares below.

Josie's father came out on the porch to see his daughter off. Ronald hardly knew him. This was the first time the boy had ever seen Mr. Mullett without his gory apron on and a saw or a knife in his fist. He seemed to be a very mild gentleman in private life, and he pleaded with an almost womanish anxiety:

"Now, bub, see that you take good care of my little girl."

This would have been a most flattering remark but for that abominable, belittling "bub."

Ronald stammered, "Oh yes, ma'am—sir," and made off with his ward.

He nearly broke her neck on the steps, and he let the front gate slam Josie on the stummick. And there still remained the walk to Mrs. Budlong's. Ronald clumped along as glumly as if he had been married to this squaw for years, and Josie minced as if every crack in the boards were an abyss.

To the casual passerby the twain were the least terrifying things in the world—a little boy and a little girl, brother and sister, probably, going along a stumbly sidewalk to a little festival in a little yard.

But to themselves it was an epic enterprise, as momentous a foray as if Ronald were Sir Ronald, knight, escorting Josefina, ladye gent, through a dragon-infested world. The terror of public observation that they shared in common was as nothing to the terror they mutually inspired. Previously they had played together in the school recesses like two children playing together, but they were as afraid of each other in full uniform as if they had put on magic garments of fear.

The sight of the Budlong lawn, however, restored them to life; for magic had been at work there also. To their meager-experienced eyes the tawdry spectacle was an elfin realm. The Chinese lanterns swinging in the wind were jubilant bells of scarlet and crimson flame, summoning happy people to a mystic space where princesses in iridescent raiment moved among shadowy squires. The kitchen tables, under their cloths laden with merchandise, were banquet boards groaning with royal lusciousnesses.

As they came up they could hardly find the heroism to join the darkling multitude; but, fortunately, one of the lanterns caught fire. There was a leaping of blazes among dark leaves, a scurry of gasping women, a rush of intrepid men, a snatching and stamping, and a subsidence of general relief. Into this hurly-burly the children slipped with natural eagerness, and escaped the anguish of an entrance.

Once among his cronies, Ronald promptly abandoned Josie to her own devices. He forgot his ceremonial attire and joined the other boys in the varied mischiefs that make grown-ups apologize for being parents. He made a nuisance of himself with the rest, and never thought of Josie till it came time for

"refreshmunce." He was sorry he had burdened himself with a dragging anchor, but his sense of duty won the battle with his sense of fun, and he proceeded to do the handsome. When he looked for Josie he could not find her.

All the other girls were gobbling disgracefully, stowing cargoes of ice cream into their smirks and prolonging the ecstasy to disgust. It annoyed him to see them lick the chorklet frosting off their fingers.

He asked some of them if they had seen Josie, and they sneered at him across their smeary spoons. They were their mothers' daughters, and carried on the instinct of conservation and social category as well as of sectarian religion. Josie did not even belong to their church.

He found Josie hiding in a corner of what Mrs. Budlong called "the lib'ary," because there was a bookcase there. And there, alone, in a big chair, was Josie, as wildly pretty as a captured rabbit with timorous eyes and tremulous nose.

She had been snubbed and neglected and backed out of cliques till she had taken refuge in obscurity. She greeted Ronald with a timid "Hello!" but when he asked her to come on out and have s'micecream 'n' cake, she shook her head till her long curls lashed her cheeks.

"I wouldn't wish for any, please—much obliged," she murmured.

A native chivalry made his heart blaze with rage at a cruel world, and there was warmth enough left to give a peculiar gallantry to his gruff:

"I'll bring you some."

He hurried out to the table and demanded two plates of ice cream and two pieces of cake. He

slapped his whole thirty cents down with a Monte Carlo majesty, and bore away the loot with the splendid intention of a swell hastening from a lordly buffet with an ice for a *marquise*. He jiggled part of a slithery cone off one of the plates, and nobly insisted that the lesser dish was his.

Josie pretended that she preferred the other plate, but graciously yielded to the Ronald's exquisite compulsion.

"Aw—go on!"

As soon as she had fed, Josie gained the courage to say that she thought she'd ought to be going along on home now, because it was getting so awful late. Ronald deferred to her whim, concealing his regret at leaving his fellow bandits to their pranks.

He and Josie stole away without attracting the attention they feared, and he escorted her along the gloomy walk with an excellent simulation of bravado. He held her slim arm in a firm grip, not so much to keep hold of her as to keep her at a distance.

He had heard, of course, fearsome stories and ideas from the more ribald boys, but he had no more inclination to put his arm round Josie's complicated sash than to thrust it into the kitchen stove. As for trying to kiss her, he would rather have assailed his uncle Amos, the one with the prickly whiskers.

He got her to her front steps, and waited till she had fished the key from under the door mat and found the keyhole. He noted, in a vaguely blissful stupor, that she was eerily sweet to see as the moonlight revealed her turning to whisper:

"I had a nawful nice time."

He faltered:

"So d'I. G'-night!"

Then he found himself alone, with all that distance to go to the front gate and no assurance that the bloodcurdling, yelping dog was chained.

The gate let him out into the street, where the trees hissed and waved their boughs like tossing horns, where every shadow probably contained a lurking burglar, and where the patches of moonlight and lamplight were even more perilous, since they would disclose him to the gruesome footpads that follow little boys home at night and always almost spring out upon them.

Ronald wondered, then, as many an older boy has wondered, going home alone after a sweethearting, why love should be able to lure a fellow into such hazardous and costly excursions from common sense.

III

The next morning he admired himself in the mirror as a successful courtier with a triumphant love affair on. This self-presented D. S. C. sustained him through the smart flippancies of his father at the breakfast table.

"Well, how's young Mr. Mullett this morning? When does your name go up on the sign: 'Joseph Mullett & Son-in-Law?' Do we get a discount on our beefsteak and sausage?"

Ronald smiled wryly at all this, but his mother's despondency worried him. What Ronald could not understand was his mother's baffling illusion that there was something ignoble about the art of butchery.

It was, to Ronald, the most heroic of professions. From his earliest memories of accompanying his

mother on marketing tours through the bazaars of Carthage, of all the places they visited, the butcher shop was the only one that inspired him with a sense of nobility. Here were bought and sold not things made or gathered with hands—bread, calico, buttons, lamps, stoves, pills, lotions, saddles, cheeses, flours, candies, and trinkets—but living flesh made dead to keep people alive.

This shop was cool on the hottest days, and there was sawdust to scumble the shoes in. The walls were hung with fowl, in their feathers or naked, with hams, with chains of sausage, and with the incredibly long looped-up tongues of oxen.

There was a screen door to keep the flies from getting out, and the ceiling was festooned with tinted papers cut in marvelous curves, a rosy bower for the flies to go to when they were scared off the meat or tired of it.

In contrast with the extreme daintiness of this fly club were the trunks of enormous trees mounted as chopping blocks. And there were marble slabs and huge bins of ice where the fresh fish sprawled, sad-eyed water people in miracles of pliant, radiant chain armor, their mouths always ajar in an expression of excusable despondency.

There were hooks and hooks, and all sorts of things depended from them—sometimes a whole half of an ox, or a sheep with its insides all out; a wonderful interior view, something like a church.

Now and then there were hogs, martyrized downward like St. Peter, or little pigs looking so much alive they might be expected to run away if their feet were not tied as a precaution.

Now came the dark era when Ronnie dared not

mention butcher shops at home, for fear his father would make fun of him or his mother shame.

The whole neighborhood, in fact, reeked of Ronald's love affair.

He slapped several little girls' faces, and whipped, or was whipped, by various boys of assorted sizes, before his romance became commonplace enough to be let alone.

His mother no longer took him on her marketing tours. In fact, she took her trade to another shop. Mr. Mullett wondered why, but set it down to the habit of people to change their homes, climates, clothes, churches, doctors, lawyers, lovers, and tradespeople. We are all Bedouin in something, though we stick never so fast at home.

As for Ronald, nothing could have pleased him better than his mother's abstinence from shopping at the Metropolitan Market, for then he was sure that she would never catch him there.

Mr. Mullett did not mind his presence during the hours when shoppers were infrequent. Sometimes he would talk to the boy about the mysteries of his craft. He would draw diagrams on sheets of paper, showing the geography of beef, mutton, veal, and pork, and the names of all the parts. This science had a terminology of its own, and the boy mastered the lexicon—chine, cutlet, fillet, loin, rack, round, rump, roast, rib, the first, second, and third chucks, and the rest.

Surveying the map of a cow, he exclaimed, once:

"It's like a Unineted States, isn't it?"

"That's right!" said Mr. Mullett. And, covering it with a hand like the flat of a cleaver, he said: "See if you can bound the plate."

Ronald ran his tongue round his cheeks, turned his eyes inward, and faltered:

"Lea' me see: The plate is bounded on the north by the—er—um—the first chuck, the first-cut standing ribs, the middle cut, and the back ribs; on the east by er—er—the skirt; on the west by the bolar; and on the south by the—the—on the south by the —wait naow!—on the south by the brisket."

"Grand!" roared Mr. Mullett. "We'll make a butcher for true out of you one of these fine days."

Ronald never had an accolade that thrilled him more. And the pity of it was that he did not dare take home this head mark in such contrast with his school reports.

When, however, Mr. Mullett described the exquisite technic of slaughter, Ronald found that a short lecture went a long way.

Josie, too, regretted that part of her adored father's business as something inexplicable and none of hers. She regarded him with the piety of an idolator toward a god, crediting him with everything beautiful and bountiful, but setting aside the painful, the horrible, and the cruel, as things too deep for her to understand. He knew. That was enough for her.

She was a delicate thing, and her father made no effort to harden her heart to the brutal necessities of the food problem. He knew that the daintiest people must have their fish, flesh, and good herring, unless they are vegetarians, and he doubted that vegetarians were people, certainly not Christians. If everybody was to eat meat, somebody had to kill it. So there you were.

He believed in the efficacy of blood to health. He fed his daughter on the sweetest meats he could dis-

cover. She needed building up. He feared for her life that it was briefly meant. He knew too well what made good beef and what not. He knew those poor little heifers and yearlings and shoats that would never be worthy even of the knife of the butcher. He wanted his daughter to be strong enough for any of the bludgeonings of chance. Meanwhile, he wanted her to be happy as long as she could. He hoped she would win a better husband than poor Ronald, the scion of butter and eggs, but so long as she liked Ronald and Ronald adored her, he should be made welcome.

Otherwise, he would have thrust the lad out of the shop and sent the girl to her room, for he was jealous of her love without knowing it.

He tolerated Ronald and gave him the freedom of the shop, let him sell things and make change. But he warned him away from the sharp tools of his trade. "Knives are always loaded," he said.

So Ronald had to watch from a distance the adroit executions of Mr. Mullett, the poise of the cleaver, and its quick bite into the crackling joint, the selection of just the right implement for just the requisite operation, the strange slish of the blade drawn across the meat like a fiddler's bow, the rapid falling apart of the red mass, the dainty manipulation of a rasher of bacon into ribbons, the miniature Frenching of a chop, the management of the saw with a voice like the bray of a tiny donkey—hee-haw, hee-haw—all the music and mystery of this big surgery.

It was fine to see Mr. Mullett pare a slab off a quarter of beef and toss it into the pan of the scale. A glance at the excited arrow sufficed, and then he took it out and trimmed it.

Ronald thought it was fine of him to weigh it before he worked on it. He marveled at the nicety of his skill, the fact that he never cut himself. He evidently had cut himself a few times, but Ronald never saw him make a miss. After every apparently reckless wielding of the deadly edges, his fingers ran here and there, nibbling up the pieces, the gristle and rind and fragments of bone, which he tossed aside. Then he wrapped the remnant neatly in a paper, and said, "Was there anything else to-day?"

Ronald had no more golden dream all that summer than that of becoming the junior partner of Mr. Mullett and the senior partner of Miss Mullett.

But time is of the essence of such a contract, and there were many weary years ahead of this young man's day for taking up either shopkeeping or housekeeping.

September divorced the young couple, for it brought on school again. The first separation was tragic, but it grew customary. Other boyhood businesses occupied his mind, and he saw little of Josie.

His ambitious mother forced him away to a preparatory academy, and new sweethearts from new regions kindled new fires in the little stove in his breast. It came to be mere tradition that he had ever loved a butcher's daughter, and when he remembered he smiled with all the grandeur of a Sophomore.

"I was young and foolish then."

A few evenings after he reached Carthage on a college vacation the high-school commencement came off. Everybody in town was going, so Ronald yawningly presumed he would drop over for a while.

There was a mild sensation at the dinner table

when Ronald's father read aloud from the Carthage evening paper the announcement that the scholarship prize had been taken by Miss Josephine Mullett.

Ronald's mother flinched. Ronald blushed, and his mother was proud of him for it.

But his father had to go and say:

"Seems to me I remember the young lady's name. Wasn't she to be our daughter-in-law or something?"

"Aw, cut it out, dad!" Ronald protested, and his mother backed him up.

"It seems to me rather cruel to twit the poor child with such ancient history."

"Oh, I'm the cruel one now," said Mr. Milligrew. "As I remember it—"

"If you would remember that your steak is getting cold!"

"Speaking of steak, where'd you get this piece of sole leather—at the shoe store or the harness shop? Can't we go back to the Metropolitan? They sell meat there."

"We might—now," Mrs. Milligrew murmured.

IV

Ronald dropped over to the high-school commencement and smiled to see the girl graduates, like white-robed priestesses, amble awkwardly in their home-draped costumes to the platform. Among them were several sheepish males in black. They all sat about like the olio of a denatured minstrel performance.

In the starchy flock Ronald could not spot Josie. But in the course of the exercises she was introduced by State Senator Cinnamon as the leading scholar of

the class (applause) who would read an original essay entitled, "The Influence of Culture on Character."

Ronald smiled at the provincial majesty of the title, and blushed to think of his own past.

Then the bottom dropped out of the world for Ronald; Josie, the awkward little goose he remembered, floated to the front of the stage with something of the gliding snowiness of a swan.

She was tall and slender, but very curvy, and not with the curviness of a gawky little girl. Little Josie had been hollow chested and plump stomached. But this Josie was decidedly neither. She was very frail, however—as lithe as a budding willow, but terrifyingly pallid.

Her voice had the Josie timbre, but something had silvered the wire. Her essay was made up of moth-eaten platitudes in shelf-worn phrases, but they sounded to Ronald like sibylline utterances. He had an attack of what his mother called "hot flashes." In fact, his soul and body were like a distant horizon quivery with heat lightning.

He told himself that he must not die of worship in public. He used his mother's pet words, "You must not. You shall not. I simply will not let you!" And so, by sheer effort of will, he kept himself from swooning. He vowed that by the same imperative power he would save Josie from the death that seemed to wait for her like an impatient beau. It seemed to him an eternity until the wretched speakers who followed her had read their drool and the diplomas had been handed out like sticks of Italian bread.

He hurried to the side door and awaited Josie's

exit as if she were a great actress and he a rural Johnnie. Her father and mother were there already, waiting for her. They were worrying about night air and they carried wraps. They did not recognize Ronald, and he did not introduce himself.

The other graduates trooped out, tittering or glum, and then the swan. Ronald stepped forward, only to be bunted aside by Mr. Mullett, who flung a wrap around his darling with the fussiness of an old maid.

Ronald sidled along, trying to break into the parental cries of "You were just grand!" and "Oh, such a picture you made!" At length he gained an opening, lifted his hat, and said:

"Miss Mullett, I believe."

"Why, Ronnie! Why, Ronnie! Poppa! Momma! This is Ronnie Milligrew! And hasn't he grown?"

The father and mother nodded and grumbled, and glared at him with evident jealousy. He was a wooer now, a wolf sniffing about the fold where their lamb was sheltered.

The wolf gave up and retired. He had a woeful night. The next morning he called Josie on the telephone—from the drug store. He implored permission to call at once, but Josie was busy till evening. She said she would just love to see him then.

That was the longest day in several years, but evening had to come, and it found Ronald dressed to the nines—whatever they are. He went along the street no longer afraid of open-air burglars, but more afraid than ever of Josie.

He was afraid that he would be alone with just her and his emotions, and he was equally afraid that her parents would stick around.

Her parents were there and they stuck around.

They greeted Ronald with ill-concealed hostility. Mrs. Mullett did most of the talking. It was all about Josie's ill health. The way she had studied, you never could believe. A regular bookworm, she was. Her nose never out of a schoolbook! She done a three years' course in two; yes, she did—and what was the use of it? Her health no good—that was what was the use of it. And now the doctors said she might have to go away and rest for a year, maybe.

This threw Ronald into a new panic. He was fairly perishing to be alone with Josie. He tried to signal to her with his eyes and to indicate the front porch with the top of his head. She guessed his meaning and smiled—such a smile! He wondered what new kind of electricity she used to light up so. She murmured:

"It's too stuffy in here. I think I'll take a breath of air, if Ronald doesn't mind."

Ronald said, "That's a good idea," with a violent indifference. Her father looked up over his spectacles and the edge of the *Drovers' Journal*, and said:

"You got to have something round you, honey. I'll get it."

He rose with mountainous effort, like a bull getting up, and found a shawl, wrapped her in it, patted her shoulders, and watched her out, as if she were on her way to the guillotine.

Outside, in the shimmering radiance that makes palaces out of cottages, Ronald felt poetry fairly bleeding through his heart, but he could find no more Petrarchan vocabulary than:

"Gee! Josie, but you're a sight for sore eyes! Swell? Why, you've got all these Carthage girls, or any other girls, lookin' like nothin' at tall."

"Thanks, Ronnie! You're pretty handsome yourself."

He perjured himself superbly.

"You always were the only girl for me, Josie. I never could seem to get my mind off you. Remember the—"

Then ensued an exchange of reminiscence, and they laughed tenderly over their early amour, as if they were nonagenarians talking about their great-grandchildren.

It was heaven till old Mr. Mullett had to come blundering to the door and drag her in. Ronald bade her good-night formally, and she asked him to call again sometime.

As he went along the walk he told himself that if it hadn't been for her old man he'd have hugged her to death right there.

"Sometime" meant the next evening to Ronald. Going her way, he vowed that if he only found her alone he'd grab her like sixty. She was alone on the porch. The moonlight was there again and she swimming in it in her rocking chair like a mermaid in a lagoon. But the thought of hugging her struck Ronald as an act of appalling impossibility. He was afraid of her again, with a queer and reverential terror. His heart bucked and plunged at the sacrilege of his desire.

He hated her father because he expected him to appear at the door every moment. He hated her father's trade, and vowed that as soon as he could get a job he would marry Josie and rescue her from the ignominy of being only the daughter of what she was. He would make her the wife of all that he was going to be.

The partnership plans of Mullett and Milligrew suffered a change indeed. The old man hated the boy as much as the boy him. They were rivals now for the heart of this spiritual creature, already so poised between sky and ground that one could hardly say whether she were an angel hovering about the earth and tempted to alight, or a young saint trying her wings for the long, long journey.

One evening Ronald was met at the door by Josie's mother, who told him that Doctor Chadlow had sent Josie to bed because she was awful poorly—chills like she'd be shook apart; then a blazing fever, and sweats that drenched her like she'd got caught out in the rain, and altogether so perf'ly mis'ble she could hardly lift her pore head.

Ronald huskily stated that that was too bad, and he hoped she'd be better soon, and if he could do anything, why, just let him know.

If he could do anything! But what could a cub at his age do for an ailing young woman, frozen and blistered and shattered? He stole down the street, and the trees once more hid fiends of terror. If he could only do something!

He believed that he had found his career at last. He would be a physician so that he could help his sweetheart in her future perils. After all, of what value was a man to a woman if he could not fend off the enemies of ill health, fight microbes and all the pestilences that replace the harmless ogres of earlier days. Your doctor is your only real knight errant.

But by the time Ronald could graduate from a medical school, where would Josie be? She had Doctor Chadlow. The old fluff! To think that her safety should depend on such a dub as that!

Ronald wanted to telegraph for the greatest specialists in the world, bring them on private trains or by airships, ignoring the expense. But he realized that while he might be willing to ignore the expense, the doctors and the railroad companies might not. Ronald's pocket wealth totaled a dollar and a quarter. He cried curses on poverty and youth and helplessness.

Josie's father was in much the same case. He was as frightened as the boy was. He was not used to being afraid of anything. He had always boasted that he had no nerves. And now he seemed to have nothing else. He would stand outside Josie's door like an old, wounded bull, stuck full of *banderillas*, blind, and wavering with rage and fear, not knowing which way to charge against the taunting, intangible matadors and picadors.

For all his stolidity of manner, he was in an absolute panic. He could not sleep of nights. He made blunders at the shop, gave the wrong cuts to the wrong people, slashed his own fingers, started to saw his own thumb off, and did not know it till a customer gasped.

The customer was Mrs. Milligrew. She had come back to his market, not knowing where Ronald had been spending his evenings. Ronald had grown up enough to resent being asked, and to evade replies.

Mrs. Milligrew had heard that Josie was very ill. She asked about her. Mr. Mullett talked to her with a freedom that shocked her.

"It's a lump on her chest right here between the fourth and fifth ribs. It keeps on growin'; it hurts her awful. Doctor don't seem to know what's wrong."

"You don't suppose it's—" Mrs. Milligrew dared not breathe the frightful word "cancer." She did not need to. Mullett waved his taurine head.

"Oh, I don't know what it is. It's right over her heart, whatever it is, and that's bad. She's awful sick. Was there anything else to-day?"

Mrs. Milligrew took some unnecessary Hamburger steak, just to cheer him up a little.

At dinner that evening Mr. Milligrew praised the meat. He knew it was Metropolitan. His wife sighed.

"Poor Mr. Mullett is so worried. His poor daughter is very ill. Her heart—it seems to be her heart."

Tears gushed to Ronald's eyes because he heard his mother express sympathy for his disprized love. But he did not let her know.

It made Josie's illness a little more beautiful, a little nicer, to connect it with the heart. That lump of muscle, that mere suction pump, has gained a vast prestige on account of the influence of poets and others who have credited it with being the seat of the passion of love. The Greeks preferred the liver; other nations other organs; but it pays to advertise, and the heart is spoken of with respect gained under false pretenses.

Mr. Mullett had no illusions about the heart. He knew its importance, but it was a mechanical, not emotional importance. He was relieved, and not shocked, when the trouble developed sufficiently for diagnosis as an abscess.

Ronald would have been shocked if he had known. Abscesses are not romantic; they are rough prose in the pages of agony. They are gathering places of that offensive battle débris politely known as suppuration.

Nice people do not suppurate. Not if they can help it. Josie could not help it. Her father had no poetic daintiness, no squeamishness. He wanted to know what was the matter of his girl. Pus was the matter, and pus is no longer considered "laudable" under any circumstances.

He breathed easier when Doctor Chadlow told him the exact situation.

"Is that all? Well, go in after it and get it out," he thundered.

"Ah yes," Doctor Chadlow laughed sardonically; "'go in after it.' But the heart is right there and I dare not. The abscess will point of itself, I hope."

But it would not point. It would only ache and grow, seething like a little volcano that will not erupt. Josie could not afford a volcano. She had studied away all her reserve strength. Her father watched night after night. He ran over to the house in daytime alarms, his apron still on. He besought the doctor to probe, but the doctor was afraid.

"It will point before long."

"But my Josie won't be here."

The two men quarreled in their different ways—Mullett burly, snorting, lurching; Doctor Chadlow spindly, whiny, deprecatory.

Mullett said, "You're afraid."

"Yes, I am afraid," Chadlow confessed. "I am not in the habit of killing my patients."

"No; but you've let a lot of 'em die. I tell you you've got to take a chance."

"I will not. If you distrust my skill, call in another doctor."

"I'm goin' to."

"I should welcome a consultation."

They called in Doctor Talley. Whether from professional discretion, small-town agreement, or from unwillingness to take a risk that the older practitioner refused, Doctor Talley came to the house with his mind already made up to confirm Doctor Chadlow's decision.

Mullett went into the room with them, but he turned away while they made the examination. He had never seen the little mound that had grown over Josie's heart. She was no longer a child, but a young woman, and holy from his eyes.

After the doctors had finished, they patted Josie's shoulder and told her that she was doing fine; then they went out on the porch with Mullett to hold the —"autopsy" was the word that Doctor Talley nearly used.

They did not see the young man who had been pacing up and down like a sentinel, watching for the doctors to come out that he might ask them what he dared not ask the parents.

He hurried away at the sight of Josie's father, seeing that he was bareheaded and shirt-sleeved, and in his very attitude almost borne to the earth under a yoke too heavy for his broad shoulders.

When Doctor Talley said he agreed with Doctor Chadlow that any effort to lance the abscess would probably cause a rupture into the heart, with fatal results, the maddened father snorted:

"'Probably!' But if you don't, she dies certainly!"

"One never knows," Doctor Talley dodged.

"While there's life there's hope," was Doctor Chadlow's contribution.

Mullett did not want excuses for inaction; he wanted a fight.

"So you both refuse to operate—both of you?"

"Absolutely."

"Absolutely."

"Then I will!"

The two doctors gasped, put up their hands, looked at each other, at the butcher, this blockhead of cleavers and saws who would thrust his loutish fists into the delicate machinery that watchmakers feared to touch. Doctor Chadlow was patient.

"You don't mean that, Mr. Mullett. You are excited."

"You bet I am! That girl upstairs is my baby, and if you two cowards are afraid to do your duty, I'm not."

"But, really, you have no right to, you know."

"Who has a better right? I'm her father, ain't I?"

"But you have no diploma. The law of the state forbids an unlicensed physician to practice."

"There's a law that's older than the state, and that's the law I'm goin' to obey."

Doctor Chadlow was genuinely sorry for the distracted father. He tried to coerce him.

"I beg you, Mr. Mullett; I must protest. If you force me to it, I shall have to notify the police."

"If you do, I'll knock your head and the policeman's together."

"Well," sighed Chadlow, "I wash my hands of responsibility. I quit the case now."

"It has never been my case," said Talley.

"Oh no, you don't!" Mullett roared, and seized each of them by a wrist in a grip there was no gainsaying. "You two are going to stand by and tell me

what to do and how to do it; and you're going to take care of her when she comes out of the ether."

"But you can't anæsthetize her in her present condition. She'd never survive that."

"Then, by God! I'll do it without!"

Doctor Chadlow was horrified.

"And what if we refuse to be parties to this?"

Mullett answered very quietly:

"Then I'll kill you both for killing her."

There was no need to shout a thing so earnestly intended as this, and Doctor Chadlow felt that the whole police force of Carthage would be of no avail against the vision he had of that mighty butcher running amuck with a swinging cleaver. He yielded with a last flare of protest.

"Very well. Her blood be on your own hands."

"My hands are used to blood," said Mullett. "Go get your tools and let's not waste any more time."

V

When Doctors Chadlow and Talley came back to the house with a case of instruments and bundles of necessary equipment, they found Mrs. Mullett waiting for them in a flutter.

"Poppa says you're goin' to operate." Evidently he had not told her the exact situation. Doctor Chadlow tempered the truth.

"An operation seems to be indicated."

"Is it very dangerous?"

Doctor Chadlow was too good to be afraid of an altruistic lie.

"We hope for the best," he smiled.

"Do you want me to help?"

"The nurse will manage nicely, thank you."

"You'd best send poppa out of the room."

"I think we'll let him stay. You wait here. It won't be long."

They went upstairs and found the nurse in a state of bewilderment. At the bedside sat big Mullett in his shirt sleeves. He held in his two huge palms the little trusting hand of Josie.

"I've told her," said Mullett, "and it's all right—ain't it, baby?"

Josie answered in a tiny voice:

"I'm not afraid so long as poppa tells me not to be."

The old man watched while they brought up a kitchen table and covered it and made all things ready.

Mullett shifted his frame to hide them from the girl's eyes when they set the little side table with the ghastly cutlery, but she heard it clink.

Then he went into another room with them—the spare room—while they told him just what to do.

Doctor Talley started to draw a diagram and give a primer lesson in anatomy, but Mullett waved his hand impatiently.

"I know all about that. It's between the fourth and fifth ribs, you say. I 'ain't seen it, but I know where that is—right here." He opened his shirt and set the point of a bistoury against the spot, as he recited his lesson. "And I make a crosscut—this-a-way and that-a-way, and it's got to go three-quarters of an inch deep." He breathed a bit heavily at that.

He had laid out a clean apron, one of his own. He put it on now and tied it, rolled his sleeves a trifle higher, washed his hands, and let the doctors sterilize

them as best they could. Then he led the way back to Josie's room.

He went like an ancient Roman in the full authority of the *patria potestas*. He went like another Virginius to plunge the knife into the bosom of his daughter—not to save her from a vile, insistent lover, not even to save her for some unknown husband—just to save her for herself, that she might grow to her destiny.

He hid the knife from Josie's eyes. Then he went to her and kissed her and said:

"Are you ready, honey?"

She nodded, and reached up to pat his cheek, as if to tell him not to be afraid. It was as if she had flicked him with a white rosebud. This was very hard for him to bear.

He let the nurse and the doctors lift her and place her on the table. He bent his shaggy brows together as he thought of the grisly pain he must inflict—he that had always striven to save her from so much as a bruise.

"It's goin' to hurt, honey," he said.

"That's all right, poppa."

"It's goin' to hurt a lot. Can you stand it?"

"I'm your daughter, don't you think?"

He smiled, and spread his hand across her brow, wishing he might shield her devout gaze from the sight of him in such an office.

Then the nurse threw back her gown and he staggered away, clenching his eyes against her white beauty.

All that saved him from refusing the sacrilege was rage at the sacrilege of the misshapen lump that marred the perfect sculpture of her bosom. It was coiled there like a little mottled viper.

He put out his great left hand. It shuddered as it touched her. He forced himself to look while he drew an imaginary cross above the spot, and asked:

"Like this?"

The peering doctors nodded.

He glanced to his daughter again, tried to smile back to her trustful smile—the last, perhaps, that would ever wreathe her lips.

Then he bowed to his task, set his thumb three-quarters of an inch from the point of the instrument to make sure of his depth, drew a great breath, put the needle-tip of the blade against the quaking skin, drove the steel deep, and made the long slash.

A throe of anguish lifted her whole body, and a wild cry cut the air like another knife. It reached the mother's ears in the room below, and she echoed it and dropped to the floor in a huddle of terror. Faintly it reached the boy on the steps outside, and he caught at his own heart. He would have run if his knees had not refused.

But the father could not run. He set his teeth; his frown deepened till he had but one great eyebrow across his corrugated forehead.

A faint voice came to him from the child.

"I'm sorry I made a noise, poppa; I wasn't quite ready. Is there another?"

He tried to say, "One more, honey," but he feared to open his teeth lest blasphemy issue from his black heart. His head went up and down to say "Yes."

He put the knife to its task again and signaled his daughter with a little tap. She whispered:

"All right, poppa."

She clenched her teeth. The body rose again as the knife went in. There was no sound now, but a

most awful silence, a sudden vanishing of every sign of life, as if a candle had been blown out.

The doctors pushed Mullett aside and stared at the motionless figure. Doctor Chadlow gasped, almost with a triumphant horror:

"You've killed her!"

Mullett crashed backward into a chair and let the weapon drop. He had done his best, and a cowardly fate had played him false. He had put his one gift at the service of his child, and he had no other. He sat inert, unresisting, exhausted, while the doctors and the nurse wrought over the girl. At length the nurse gave a little gasp.

"She's coming round! See!"

Mullett did not hear this, or heed the subsequent scurry.

Doctor Chadlow was a good man, and there was not exactly disappointment in his announcement; yet there was something lacking in his enthusiasm when he laid his hand on Mullett's shoulder and said:

"She's whispering for you."

He had to say it more than once before the stupid monster understood. When he did he leaped up, knocking the chair backward. He ran to the child, bent, and almost smothered her with a kiss. Then he lifted his head and bellowed for all the world to hear:

"Momma! Josie's all right! Momma, come quick!"

VI

It was agreed that, in view of all the possibilities of gossip and legal complications, it should not be

mentioned that the operation had been performed by a layman.

Young Mr. Milligrew only knew that Josie was getting better and would be able to see him before long.

He was walking with his mother one day. Mrs. Milligrew was very proud of her handsome son, and she had such a glowing future imagined for him that when they passed the Metropolitan Market it never occurred to her that this meant anything more in his history.

"We must stop in and ask poor Mr. Mullett how his daughter is."

Ronald entered the old paradise with remembrances fluttering like the tinted papers that still festooned the ceiling. The same exhibits were there —the plates of sausage meat, the long coils of ox tongue, the gleaming heap of fish, the dressed and the undressed fowl, the pigs' feet, calves' brains, the sprawl of liver, and the bowlders of beef.

Ronald forgot all the past, for Josie herself was there. She greeted him and his mother in much the same tone, and thanked them both for their felicitations on her recovery. Mrs. Milligrew felt that she was no longer a menace to Ronald, and was so well assured that she remembered that she'd better have a few extra chops for supper.

Mr. Mullett wielded the cleaver and the carver with his old-time nicety.

And he smiled at Ronald with his old-time tolerance, for Ronald was to him no longer a rival for his daughter's love.

Ronald felt very young himself all of a sudden. Josie smiled at him, indeed, but from an infinite

distance. She seemed to have gone back again to little girlhood, to have become once more her father's child alone.

Mr. Mullett tossed the chops on the scale, glanced at the dancing arrow, and proceeded to French away the surplus with delicacy. His fingers went nibbling among the remnants and tossed them aside. Then he delivered the parcel—to Ronald!

And Ronald could not quite resent the humiliation, for there was an extraordinary dignity about this butcher, where he stood with one brawny arm akimbo and the other hand poising a great knife on the chopping block, as he said to Mrs. Milligrew:

"Was there anything else to-day?"

XI

THE QUICKSILVER WINDOW

I

STARING into a mirror has always been among the most awful delights of the human soul. Apart from any grace of modesty or flaw of vanity, one's features are a fascination, a mystery. To gaze into a looking-glass is to study a hopeless stranger. For what soul ever recognized itself in the alien being on the other side of that casement? What soul ever found itself truly expressed by its own image? or felt itself anything but belied and mistranslated by the eyes, the nose, the mouth, the brow, across that barrier between the inner self and the outer self?

It was now an actress who sat before her glittering reflection, peering through a border of well-wishing telegrams as she built upon her own face a new face, underlaying and overlaying, calcimining and painting, lining and dotting with black and white and blue and red. She worked it up with expert knowledge of values, finishing a cheap chromo that should look divinely beautiful through the veil of the footlights. Her own skin was like a canvas set upon an easel, and she toiled over it as over a stranger's portrait, fashioning a grotesque and living mask for herself to wear. She was privileged to explore all the mys-

tery of her own personality and the endless mysteries of the personalities she assumed.

But while she plied the rabbit's foot and the pencil, mascaro and rouge-stick, a frowzy-headed messenger boy, whose tilted cap bore the number 88, was drawling along his way to the theater with a telegram of such dire import that it were almost better for her had he carried dynamite.

The wisdom of experience fathered the rule that telegrams arriving at theaters are not given to the actors just before or during a performance; but, being a rule, it is set aside at the times of most importance. That is why, on the first night of the new piece at this theater, when the people were as flighty as a pack of running horses at the starting post and as ready to be stampeded by a flutter of paper, telegrams were handed to them in bundles, uncensored.

Of course, these messages were pretty sure to be the preliminary ovation of an invisible audience of remote well wishers; but among these greetings what baleful news might come, to throw a leading woman into hysterics or plunge a low comedian into helpless grief!

As a matter of fact, unsuspected by anybody in all that anxious playhouse, a telegram was bound their way which boded ill to the peace of mind of Sally Sloane, and, therefore, to the whole gleaming band wagon hitched to the ruddy little star she was.

Without knowing it, Sally Sloane was running a desperate race with a tortoise. She thought it only a first-night fever that goaded her to finish making up for her entrance, but she would have said later that it was Providence trying with whip and spur to carry her under the wire before the arrival of No. 88.

Blessed, then, was procrastination for once at least, for Sally was rather a little sun than a large star, since, if she lapsed in her orbit, her fall would disintegrate a whole system. If Sally Sloane failed to captivate the public this night it was all up with the manager's money, the repute and royalties of the authors, and the company's bread-and-cheese and press notices. None realized this more keenly than Sally, and the burden frightened her to the point where fear was a disease, a seizure, a dread as of death. And yet, suffering a panic that would have driven a woman of private life to bed and a professional soldier to flight, Sally must prepare herself and go forth to the guillotines of public censorship, and she must go beautiful. She must sparkle and she must be very, very beautiful.

As she hid her features under an impasto of artifice she paused now and then to let tremors of alarm ripple icily along her, like a cold breeze shivering the surface of a lake. When at length she had finished her guise her pallors were concealed under a stationary blush. But she felt them none the less.

Seeing the pretty thing patter from her dressing room in the tinsel radiance of elfin beauty, one could never believe how grave and potent an executive of how large a corporation she was. It was like electing a fairy to be president of a railroad, or commissioning a butterfly to command an army.

She left her dressing room in time to escape the crucial telegram, but a new danger threatened her all-important poise of soul. The manager of the attraction (if that should prove to be the right term) was plunging hotfoot her way.

Hermann Blaumann had small right to cross the

dead line of the footlights, for he was merely the owner of the show. But the front of the house had proved too doleful to him during the first part of the first act.

As he stumbled down the side aisle people turned listlessly to watch him. He paused in the dark cave behind the boxes, and, through an opening in the hangings, perused the audience.

It was simply an enormous field of heads; bushels on bushels of cabbages spilled along a market stand. The aggregation was a mere congeries; it had no unity, no focus; it was not held together by the action on the stage. Those who were laughing were laughing against the play, not with it. The air was full of the fidget and cough that betray a fatal indifference.

Blaumann turned from the spectacle in dismay, groped for the fire door, and sprawled through to the stage. He was pale, sweaty, trembling as a huge clam, and about as resourceful. The chorus had just danced off the scene with violent artificial glee, in which the audience had not disturbed them.

To Blaumann they looked like a clutter of Noah's Ark manikins, painted, wooden, and stupid. He pushed roughly through and hurried to the star's dressing room. There the maid, ashen with subordinate terror, opened the door, and whispered that Miss Sloane was in the right second entrance, waiting her cue.

Blaumann started to cross the stage and was narrowly rescued from walking plump into the scene. That would have been one way of getting the first laugh of the evening, but he denied himself the luxury and bulged along a narrow alley at the back,

his figure creating a brief eclipse of the moon, and an earthquake in the pillared castle painted on the back drop.

He found his star waiting at her post, dying the death, agued with chills, hot flashes, and nausea, as she watched the acting actors slaving like joke stokers and madly shoveling wit through the furnace-door glare of the footlights at the banked audience. As they felt, only too well and all too hopelessly, they were rather smothering what fire the assembly had brought than setting up any new combustion.

Sally Sloane had watched the leading comedian, Harry Elwell, make his elaborate entrance after a big fanfare of preparation. He dashed into the limelight in his excessively humorous make-up and hurled at the audience his first magnificent hand grenade of humor. The powder must have been wet. There was no explosion. But there was a thud.

Sally Sloane saw her leading comedian go green under his grease paint. Behind the hilarious smile on his painted lips she saw the rigor of tragedy, the awful tragedy of comedy that does not go. Sally Sloane hated the leading comedian professionally and personally, but she felt sorry for him professionally and personally. Besides, his failure could not help her.

In the shadow of an upper box she could see the librettist hiding, yet feeling publicly exposed in the pillory of chagrin. He was watching his best lines die miserable deaths, his epigrams read like epitaphs. He wanted to lean over the rail and apologize to the audience, saying:

"I meant well, and it went well at rehearsal."

The star did not like the author personally or professionally, but she was sorry for him—and for herself.

The composer was conducting. His face was as white as his gloves, and he beat time jerkily like a toy wound up, snapping at encores rehearsed by the troupe but not requested by the audience.

When, next, Miss Devereaux, the handsome contralto, whom Sally loathed, swept into the fierce white light that beats upon an actress, she stumbled on her skirt and lost her lines utterly—"faded" is the vivid technical term. Sally prompted her from the wings, and all the people on the stage threw her the line surreptitiously. But she was too panic-paralyzed to take it. Her plight was so dismal that the audience was not moved to its usual guffaw at a mishap on the boards.

Sally caught the ominous import of this and groaned inwardly:

"If they won't laugh at that they won't laugh at anything."

The Prime Minister, seeing that the contralto was stuck in the mire of stage fright, spoke her speech, asked himself a question, and answered it. The dialogue limped along, and Sally quailed as she realized that the moment was near when she, too, must romp into this morgue and try to turn it into a bower of mirth. She must dance around this corpse and scatter confetti on the mourners.

In such a mood Blaumann found her. But he squandered no pity on her terror. He saw twenty thousand dollars of spent money going up in smoke. There was one hope—a miracle. If Sally Sloane could somehow—he couldn't imagine how—but

somehow—hypnotize the audience into thinking that they were being entertained the night might be saved.

He tiptoed close, and whispered in her ear: "When you go on, Miss Sloane, lift it. The show's gone to ballyhack so far. It's up to you to lift it. You've just gotta."

"Go away!" she whispered. But he persisted in a fiercely shrill tone: "Give 'em ginger, Miss Sloane. Whatever you do, give 'em ginger. You gotta get some ginger in this show or you might as well ring down."

"If you don't go back in front and stay there I'll walk out of the theater now—this minute."

Blaumann stood glaring at this little painted, powdered doll that dared to boss her boss about. Even as he bristled he heard the orchestra strike up her entrance music. All his fat melted with terror. His emotion was one of hatred and fear, of mixed desire to murder her and to mollify her. He made haste to urge:

"I didn't mean to upset you, dearie, but it's—you see—we're depending on you—and—"

He put out his clammy, hairy hands to caress her, but she knocked them aside. She gave him a look of black ferocity, the black ferocity of a desperate veteran knowing that the battle is going wrong and seeing the captain turn craven.

Contempt and wrath for Blaumann, who had brought panic back on his own stage, fear and terror of the public, which had turned thumbs down for the other gladiators writhing now in the arena, were all knotted in her daubed, distorted, unhuman features. And then—instantly—as if an angel's hand

had passed over them—they were soothed into a smile of heavenly charm, heavenly grace.

She had heard her cue, and her features, like trained soldiers, fell into line almost automatically.

The snarl she had visited on Blaumann turned to an arpeggio of laughter, the laughter of a child let out of school. And she joined the hard-put skirmishers on the firing line.

Sally Sloane never made entrances. She just walked into a room or ran down a lane, and the public happened to be eavesdropping. There was something about Sally Sloane—you could only call it "something"—that made everything all right when she was on the stage. To-night, as usual, her presence was a sort of panacea. The audience, which had been trying as doggedly to be amused as the troupe to amuse it, suddenly felt its lockjaw released. Sally had the combination. People who had not smiled at masterpieces of wit now chuckled and held their sides in ecstasy at a mere exhibition of good nature.

She said, "How d'you do?" and by some magic of delivery it seemed a personal greeting to everybody; her hand reached out and enfolded all the hands in the house.

Blaumann, watching her from the wings, felt his heart unclutch as if some one had put twenty thousand dollars into his palm with a promise of more. He growled to the stage manager, who had tiptoed up to watch the effect of Sally's experience.

"Sloane's a genius, a genuine genius. I hate her, but I love her work."

He decided to watch her work from the front. As he squeezed through the fire door he went galumph-

ing over a pair of steps, but nobody heard him; all ears were Sally Sloane's; all eyes hers, and waves of laughter were chasing one another up to the shore line of the footlights. Once more Blaumann stood and perused the audience from the dark cave behind the boxes.

The miracle had been wrought. The cabbage sprawl had become lines of human faces in profile, profiles upon profiles all pointing one way, all showing one mood, but in infinite variety. Every imaginable style of smile was there—from the shy sniggle of lean old souls to the quake-jelly glee of the fat, parsimonious grins from hard men miserly of mirth; democratic delight from high-bred ladies, and unshackled squeals from beauties of lesser birth; care-effacing smiles on careworn faces and smiles that turned deep old wrinkles to sweet new uses.

Blaumann stood in the shadow and gloated. It was not an entirely commercial emotion that led him to sigh to himself, contentedly: "A pretty sight! A pretty sight!"

He felt like a philanthropist looking down on a Christmas dinner he had provided for a horde of newsboys. But he made no bones about rendering the credit where it was due. He said to the first man he passed, "Sloane's got 'em going!"

The man answered, "She's so pretty she makes folks glad to be alive."

That was Sally's gift. Her lines were unimportant—her spoken lines; the lines her costume revealed were important, indeed, to her success, for they spelled youth, grace, rhythmic charm. The character she played was a stenciled figure. The situations the author had placed her in were trite,

and the music was a mere book of quotations. But all these things were as a vase to a flower. The perfume and the grace were Sally's. Her secret was herself.

She had no special art as an actress. Numberless women sang with better skill and purer tone, but no other woman had so much dramatic and vocal craft with so much beauty and so much magnetism. Her beauty was so great that it had an exultance in it, like a sunrise in spring or the Milky Way on a June midnight. It made people glad; it made people wish to be competent poets. Even women acclaimed her beauty and did not envy her it, for she wore her crown with the appeasing graciousness of a queen of lineage.

Millionaires could build colleges and hospitals and give alms; demagogues could extend liberties and uplift the downtrodden; inventors could give speed and comfort and make luxuries cheap; preachers and priests could give hope and courage and good counsel; painters, writers, musicians, could give color and zest and song. Sally Sloane gave joy. She deployed for the public her personality, her body, her soul. She was a great philanthropist, a founder of airy institutions. Eight times a week she gathered a throng and endowed it with the joy of life.

So, this night, this anxious night, she came on the stage like a lamp into a dark room. She frightened the bogies from the gloomy audience and the ghastly crew.

She carried the first act to a joyous curtain—to many curtains. Then she ran to her dressing room, flung off her finery, dived into a new splendor of

costume. No. 88 had come and gone, but there was no time to pause for telegrams, and the baleful message he left remained unopened.

The next act brought the tide of success higher upshore and ended in wild salvos of ovation. After the company and groups of the company and Sally alone had been revealed again and again, the composer was called for to make his gawky bow. The air was full of clamors of "Author! Author!" People had forgiven or forgotten the dolorous wit of the early evening, and he who was once a scapegoat was now a benefactor. The librettist made a speech, of course, a stupid speech, with old rubber-stamp "Thank you's." And he "especially thanked Miss Sloane for her," etc.

Once more she must dash to her room and throw off one suit of silken armor and throw on another; a hundred hooks and eyes and buttons and pins must be engaged, while the men, smoking in the foyer, voted the operetta a success and congratulated Blaumann. Blaumann strutted like any pouter pigeon —a very other man than the flabby bivalve that had sprawled so helplessly an hour ago.

The last act did not lose the ground gained before. Sally's final costume was generous to a fault in its disclosure of her many graces, but her face was the most beautiful of her beauties, more beautiful even than her wonderful shoulders or her miraculous legs; and the light in her eyes was more beautiful than her eyes, as her smile was sweeter than the lips it illumined.

The evening closed with pomp. The members of the company scattered to their cells to return themselves to mufti. They laid their plans for a long

season in the big town. But Sally Sloane must stand fatigued and receive the congratulations of a throng of acquaintances. Everybody was drunk with the new wine of success, and everything was blissful until one woman—who shall know with what intention?—murmured:

"And how young you looked, dear!"

The tinkle of the compliment fell on Sally's ears as from a cracked bell.

Then old General Buckley must roar out, with a battlefield sense of humor:

"My nephew tells me he has succumbed to Sloanitis, just as I did—how many years ago was it? Good Heavens, how tempus does fidget!"

A fly is a small thing, but it can spoil a deal of precious ointment. Sally boxed the old general's ears. She passed it off as a joke, but the slap was sincere. She just had to box those ears. The general laughed, and cherished it as a red badge of glory.

With a queen's prerogative Sally dismissed her court and fled to her room. Suddenly the taste of success soured in her mouth, a too sweet candy. Exhilaration fell from her with the costumes which her maid plucked off like petals. The aftermath of triumph sank upon her and she felt the drain of all the strength of spirit and flesh she had lavished on the crisis. Smiling was her trade and the day's work was over; her very muscles ached and her nerves were like worn fiddle strings.

"I feel as though I had been through a year of one-night stands," she sighed, as she dropped into a chair. "And I look it," she added, as she propped her head on her hands and stared into the mirror.

She dug her fingers into a jar of cold cream and smeared it on her face, scumbling her complexion into a gruesome mess, like a portrait that had been stepped on. She must doff one disguise and don another in haste, for she had promised herself for supper with Henry Creighton, a wealthy devotee, whose intentions were just as honorable as Sally might compel them to be. She liked Creighton in a supercilious way; she was graduated from the school of illusions. She knew that she could have the man and his million, in marriage, if she wanted to take them at so dear a price of liberty. She knew, too, that a large part of his admiration was for the Sally he saw across the footlights.

He was the typical Tired Business Man, and patron of all that frivols. Being a trust builder by trade, he longed to monopolize Sally at any cost, and he was forever at her to leave the stage—"quit the business," as the phrase is.

But Sally knew him better than he knew himself, and, weary as she was of her homelessness—she called herself a dramatic drummer—she felt that her best guaranty of Creighton's fidelity was in her elusiveness, her fame, and in the rivalry of a many-headed suitor, the public. It had been Sally's doctrine:

"If you want to keep a man, keep him jealous."

Her public triumph to-night had meant, among so many other successes, a new control over Creighton. She had overwhelmed him on the stage, and now she planned to overwhelm him at the table. She removed the heavy daubery of the professional varnish and began a new veneer, the make-up of a lay lady for close inspection under a lover's micro-

scopic gaze. She had laid on the colors crude and thick before, as if she had been painting a back drop. Now she would limn herself as a miniature. She must be Monet or Meissonier, as the test varied.

While she was etching the new likeness her maid reminded her that there were several telegrams still unopened.

"Read them," said Sally.

The yellow girl intoned them in a halting voice that lingered over the large words with an Ethiopian passion for polysyllables. Her lumbering elocution got on Sally's nerves and interfered with the masterpiece she was at, till finally she snatched the remainder away and skimmed them with hasty eyes, which softened at some tender remembrance, and hardened at some formal congratulation that breathed policy or envy.

And so at length she reached the telegram brought by No. 88. The words were so out of step with her other messages that she forgot her first rule of beauty, and frowned. She thought she had received it by mistake. Then she recognized the name that was signed. The message read:

Jenny presented me with twelve pound boy. Congratulate you on being grandmother to so handsome a lad. Jenny doing as well as could be expected.

LUTHER NELSON.

Sally's first sensation was a gush of tenderness for her daughter, whom she always thought of as a babe. And now that babe was a mother with a babe of her own! She felt a flash of remembering sympathy for the pain and the terror her child had undergone.

Then a cold chill shook her as she glanced over the message again and came upon the word "grandmother." She a grandmother! Sally Sloane a grandmother! The pet of the public, the very soul of endless youth, already thrust back two generations, and labeled "superfluous."

II

She had winced at even the shadow of an insinuation smuggled in with the compliment, "How young you looked!" She had boxed an old general's ears for implying that she had a past, and now she was a —a grandmother! The word tolled like a knell from a churchyard. It ached in her ears, shivered in her bones. It meant to her what insolvency means to a financier. It meant what closing the doors means to one whose bank has been a Gibraltar. Beauty was her power, her glory, her currency.

She stuffed the telegram into her bosom, where so many other secrets dwelt. She made haste to get her grease paint off. When at last she had emerged from all the spurious blushes and snow, she glared into her looking-glass to see what face might mock back at her.

There was a new woman in that magic room through the window. For the first time Sally saw in her reflection more than the jade of overwork. There was a weariness there which massage could never blot out. The rose of her beauty was drooping in the petal. She descried a warning wilting that was not mere absence of morning dew.

Sally trembled with a worse than stage fright. She was reading the scathing criticism of time; she

was slated already for the sorrowful company of the women of yesterday. She had always heard a voice wailing after her hurrying steps, "Beware the Ides of March!" And now the Ides were arrived.

Still, she could not find a trace of grandmother. She had never wasted her gifts in riotous living. She had been a watchful steward of her one talent. That opulence of beauty was not yet squandered.

She would not have it that she was a grandmother. She had kept youth by thinking youth, playing youth. The offer of a rôle in which anything but youth had been implied had been counted an insult, and it insured the rejection of the work. She had thought young so long that she and the almanac had parted company; but now, with a rush of black wings, an evil genie caught her up and set her years along the road. In a moment she was middle-aged.

She hung upon her reflection a weary while. The maid watched and wondered, but could not guess what thoughts were clamoring in that exquisite head.

Sally was remembering back over her life. It had been longer than she dreamed. With the Ariel speed of thought her memory flitted from her own childhood to her earliest betrothal, to the earliest of her marriages, and the little girl it had brought her.

That marriage, for all its romance, had not fared well. Its unhappiness had driven her from a home of discontent to the restless gypsying of an actress. At first she could not afford to keep her child with her. Rehearsals and hard travel had made it necessary to give the babe into the ward of strangers. When prosperity came it brought money, but no surcease of the Arab existence. The child had gained

more and more advantages, but not a mother. It had seemed best to the hard-worked singer to keep the little girl away from the life she knew. People protect their children's illusions the more desperately, the more completely they lose their own.

As Sally grew deeper and deeper versed in life the more she loved it for herself and loathed it for her innocent girl. She put the child into a convent as into a place of cold soul-storage, where corruption could not come.

Sally's two hapless marriages, with their noisy divorces, had widened the gulf between the child and the mother. Besides, public success made it inadvisable to parade the fact of maternity. Of all the forms of publishing her fame, the fact of motherhood was the least likely to enhance her wares. Even the all-disgorging press agent suppressed that. She was the public's sweetheart and it would dethrone her the moment she became a matron.

A woman of the stage becomes, of necessity, the father rather than the mother of her children. Livelihood is the first consideration, and then the providing of luxuries. A father is not expected to permit his children to interfere with his business or his ambition. Even if he is a widower he is not expected to give them cuddling and tucking in of nights. So, an actress, a wanderer by trade, can not often lavish on her little ones the attentions that far less eager mothers waste on their least-loved offspring.

At the hour when children are going to roost and fairy stories are told, prayers heard, and good-night kisses given—at that sacred hour of mothering the actress must be most busily at work. And in the morning, when children leap back to life, if she

would conserve her capital of beauty and energy, there must be quiet about the house. Rehearsals at all hours, matinées and extra matinées, and a sailor's readiness for indefinite cruises and unforeseen hardships—these abnormalities play havoc with instincts as with customs.

And so, with the lovingest soul imaginable, and with the most normal of cravings for her child's companionship, Sally Sloane had little of it. Even in her summer seasons she sang in cheaper troupes at half her winter salary. And so—and so—during the early years of her baby's life she was compelled to be away from her until what had been a necessity became a habit and seemed still to be a necessity.

Thus, Sally Sloane had floated along her years until, one day she was startled to have a letter from her daughter announcing that she was going to marry. The daughter had borne Sally's first husband's last name, and not Sally's stage pseudonym, and her marriage attracted no attention from the press.

Sally had tormented her glorious eyes by crying a good deal between performances, and had sent many telegrams and letters begging the girl not to make haste to marry. But we take our parents' traits more easily than their advice, and Sally's daughter married as Sally had married, at seventeen. To the Sally of now it seemed like an elopement from the nursery, and when she saw the bride's photograph she could not believe that this tall and serious woman was her own offspring.

Sally cried some more, and sent beautiful gifts and some more letters, and then—went her way. A new production absorbed her, body and soul. It

was a failure, and a fresh work must be sought and prepared. It was a success, but not a triumph, and a third vehicle was sought. At the end of the dilapidating season her doctor urged her to go to Europe and lose herself in strange environments.

The next year found her again on a treadmill. Unusual difficulties, unusual anxieties, had dogged every step of this latest production, but the result was this golden evening, the triumph of her lifetime.

She was at the very apex of her career. In costume she looked nineteen; off the stage she would have been rated at twenty-six; her enemies said she was thirty. She never said anything. But nobody would have guessed the truth; and she herself had, from sheer lack of practice, almost lost count of birthdays. Nobody would have guessed that her last had been her thirty-sixth. Anyone would rather have called truth a liar and the calendar a cheat.

It was tragic enough to be thirty-six, but to be a grandmother at thirty-six. For her to be a grandmother at all—

"It's an outrage, that's what it is, an outrage!"

"Wha'd you say, Miss Sally?"

She found herself standing erect, with fists clenched, the maid staring at her.

"Nothing," she said, and collapsed to her chair, feeling ridiculous. But she could not smother the idea that she was the victim of treachery somewhere. The child that she had brought into the world, slaved for, loaded with every luxury—that child had played a mean trick on her poor mother. She had ungratefully grown up, had selfishly married, and now—this!

A knock at the door.

"Mr. Creighton wants to know if you are ready. Supper was ordered for twelve o'clock."

"Tell him I'll be ready in a minute."

Here was a brief escape, at least, from the corrosive thought of age. She had been trained by many emergencies of railroad delay and exigencies of rôle to costume herself with the speed of a fireman. Her maid could move, too, under spur, and the dressing room was pyrotechnic with flying raiment. Hooks were snapped in place like harness on a fire horse, and she was amazingly prompt upon her promise.

She made a last survey of the woman in the mirror. She smiled to see how gracefully her image lied. Her victory over time delighted her so that her heart melted toward her ungrateful child and she was impelled to send a telegram.

She refused to permit Creighton to take it or to call a boy, and insisted that his car must be stopped at an all-night telegraph office. He must remain outside, too, while she scribbled a few words of love and a formula of rejoicing.

Her discretion did not desert her, and her telegram was so worded that it did not divulge its real history even to the shabby clerk who repeated it with lips that stuttered in the presence of the famous diva who had alighted like a meteorite in his dingy office.

When Sally rejoined Creighton he was fuming with jealous rage. He astutely proved to himself, and tried to prove to her, that her telegram was sent to some man, some absent lover.

Sally found a drop of humorous solace in the situation. It suggested a scenario to her. Sally thought in scenarios. It struck her that she would like to play the part. Then she realized that it would mean

a public performance of a grandam, and she decided that the play was not available for her.

But it confirmed her cynic attitude to realize that the false suspicion and the groundless jealousy of Creighton actually increased her value in his green eyes, while the knowledge of the sweet, simple, old-fashioned truth would have sent his love howling.

This titbit was as sweetly sharp to her palate as a candied lime. It kept her intensely amused at intervals throughout the session at the table. Never had she received such ardent court from Creighton, now emulous of an imaginary rival whom he endowed with romantic fascinations and greater wealth than his own.

But Sally laughed off his advances in the automobile and suppressed his surreptitious love at the supper, where he had gathered a brilliant crowd to witness her triumph and his own in hers. He displayed his captive queen as if she were Thusnelda and he Germanicus.

Everything was jubilation; everybody chattered congratulation; everybody claimed, "How young you look!"

"How young you look!" "How young you look!" Would they never stop saying, "How young you look!"? It ran through Sally's head like a loathsome tune that sticks in the memory the more for being hated.

One man began: "To look at you, Miss Sloane, one could never believe that you had had such a career. I remember your début. Let me see, it was in—"

He had sense enough to stop short before the daggers of her eyes.

To-night she was making another début, an un-

suspected première in the ranks of the dowagers. She got through the evening somehow by alternate spasms of reckless joy in her secret and of terror at its inevitable discovery. She felt all the emotions of an embezzling cashier squandering stolen funds and unable to escape. There was no city or country of refuge for Sally; relentless extradition would follow her everywhere.

III

She woke next day in a wreck of reaction. The first thing to see was the newspapers. They were almost all glowing, but Sally took no pleasure in the rhapsodies of the critics. This one said, "Sally Sloane has accomplished the impossible. She is more beautiful than even she has ever been." Another wrote: "Sally Sloane is a living sonnet. Every one of her fourteen lines is a poem of itself; the scansion and the rime are perfect." A third exclaimed: "Miss Sloane's beauty is important. It has authority. Nature created her on a summer afternoon and made her not of clay, but of sunbeams and lilies." Sally read the raptures with a sense of hypocrisy, of thievishness. Between the lines she read everywhere one condemning word. On the wall a hand had written her *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin.* She was afraid of her mirror, and even curiosity could not tempt her to peek at it.

The maid, dressing her, exclaimed:

"Why, Miss Sally, if here isn't a white hair!"

Since girlhood such estrays had happened now and then upon her golden head, but they were freaks of nature. This white thread chilled her like the first snowflake of winter.

After a breakfast, over which she drooped despondent, she took up the necessary letter to her daughter. The compulsory cheer was so difficult and forced that it showed through all the phrases. In a mid-Western town the daughter felt the unwarmth, and turned with a sigh to the new-come pride lying in her arm. The young father, in all the epoch-making conceit of first fatherhood, was angered.

"We'll have to cut your mother out."

He wrote a cold and formal acknowledgment of her letter. He shook his head in disgust at the need of addressing a letter to the grandmother of his son as "Miss Sally Sloane." The incident was closed. The rift widened to a gulf. The letter Sally meant to write to-day was put off till to-morrow, and the morrow was always the next day. She was like the rest of us who love our kin and would die for them, but do not write them.

Besides, Sally was a business woman as well as an artist. There were rehearsals for revision; rehearsals for understudies; photographs innumerable; interviews with people of every sort.

Sally's new rôle gave her a new vogue. Creighton was a frantic suitor, never forgetful of the mysterious lover whom Sally had telegraphed to that night. Society took up Sally with a growing interest in her vivacity which enhanced her beauty as she tried to outrun time and crowd always more and more gayety into the few hours before her doom should be decreed and proclaimed. She was fleeing always from Fate, shutting her eyes to the milestones as if that annulled them. And all the while, day and night, one word buzzed in her heart like the ringing in the ears of a man going deaf—"Gr–r–randmother–r–r!"

Her mirror became a vice. She was addicted to it as to a hated drug whose habit she could not shake off. Every new wrinkle, real or imagined, was a scar on her comfort; every hollowness, fullness, sallowness, flush, confirmed the verdict—Guilty!

The pride of seeming young, the advantage of playing youth, the glory of convincing others of youth, were only an irony. She took up the battle for beauty, visited its doctors, studied its lore, made her skin the laboratory of every nostrum that quackery devised.

And so she ran through life, a vain fugitive from her own shadow. The opera lasted a year in New York, then half a year in Chicago. Three other towns pieced out the second season.

Creighton pleaded for a cruise on his yacht, and offered to let Sally choose her own entourage of chaperons and time destroyers. She was weary of land travel. She needed a sea change. So she went. Eventually the yacht touched at Gibraltar and took up the mail that had accumulated there.

In the mass awaiting Sally was a belated cablegram from Luther Nelson, saying that his wife was dead. The blow was cruel to Sally and remorse crushed her. She found no defense in her own heart, but condemned herself for every fault she had committed, and more. Her grief was so devastating that she was forced to explain it to her host. It seemed to her a sort of penance to confess to Creighton the weight of her iniquity. She had deceived him, neglected her child unnaturally, and she deserved a shameful death.

Creighton was stunned at first, but his heart warmed with the necessity of consolation and he found himself looking upon Sally with eyes into

which a certain respect, perhaps a hint of reverence, had crept. He reminded her of her sacrifices for her child, of the luxuries she had given her, of the lavishness with which she had given the baby and the girl comfort and peace while she herself underwent hard travel, hard labor, and the hard usage of the public. He tried to persuade her that she had done for her child far more than most mothers do. He did not persuade her, but he assuaged her grief somewhat, and he counseled her to keep the matter a secret from the rest of the party, whose knowledge of it could only be embarrassing.

Sally sent long and hysterical cables to her son-in-law, and the yacht sailed on into the Mediterranean. She had now remorse as well as time to flee, and she discovered in Creighton a companion of unsuspected seriousness and gentleness.

When the yacht returned to New York Sally found Blaumann with his route booked for the third season. It covered the less large cities, with blocks of one-night stands between.

Sally looked over the route with dread. She had known so much of such hackwork in her early years that there was horror in the mere memory of cheap hotels, shoddy rooms, and half-baked towns with no traditions, no monuments, no landscapes, no gardens, no "sights" to while away the boredom of strangers.

It pained her to feel that the fatigue of travel was daunting her high spirits. She put it on the ground of pride.

When she told Blaumann that the season looked too hard to her, he answered, agape:

"You talk like an old woman."

The mere suggestion stung her to denial, and she

signed the contract at once, after stipulating that a private car should be at her disposal and that she should have an enlarged share of the profits. Already she was beginning to think of storing up provender for hibernation.

Blaumann granted her new demands with a show of resistance, and she set forth once more.

Cities now saw her that had known only the rumor of her fame; she remembered them as a humble underling who had made no impress among the traveling mummers, but the towns knew her as the famous artist whom the metropolitans had monopolized. Critics and public treated her as a queen in progress through outlying corners of her dominions. The extravagance of her unequaled success stimulated her till she forgot fatigue and almost lost the obsession of age. Her conquests were so new that they renewed her. And as the season piled up homage her bank account swelled with an income that even Creighton viewed almost with jealousy.

The tour ended in St. Louis on a warm Saturday. The last matinée gathered a crowd of self-asphyxiating dimensions and enthusiasm combining Western and Southern warmth.

At the end of the last act she came bounding from the scene laden with bouquets, with which she inundated her maid waiting at her dressing-room door. The maid spoke through a trellis of flowers:

"There's a gempman to see you. Mr. Nelson, he says his name is."

IV

The unexpectedness of the visit smote Sally dumb. She paused in a tyro's embarrassment. Sorrow for

her dead child swept over her amain. She forgot everything else, forgot that she was dressed as a comic-opera princeling, with jaunty cap set on short curls of gold, bolero jacket and sash, velvet knee-breeches, silk stockings and pumps, and a long mantle flying back from her shoulders. She had worn the costume so much that it meant nothing to her.

But it shocked the tall and solemn young man she found within. He still wore mourning for his wife, and this was his first meeting with her mother. He winced with a stitch of jealousy to see how much fairer and younger this eerie creature looked than the weary young mother whom illness had worn to a wraith.

Sally stared at the sober business man before her, so much stranger than any other stranger. She put out her hand, and stammered:

"Mr. Nelson! Luther, I suppose I should call you—I—I'm very glad to see you!"

"And I to see you, Mrs.—Miss—" He could not think what name to call her. "Miss Sloane" was intolerable, and any other name was unwarranted.

Custom seemed to enforce more than a handshake with one's son-in-law, and Sally tiptoed to kiss him. He bent down in confusion, and their lips met.

Sally felt the alien awkwardness of his greeting, but he felt more than that. He felt an incongruity so crass that it was almost sacrilege. And he tasted rouge and powder.

Both tried to speak, and neither could scare up a word. Silence fell upon them. It was broken suddenly by a gurgle of babyish rapture and a childish cry:

"Oh see, de pretty boy!"

Sally whirled, to find a chubby cherub perched on a chair and clapping his hands at her bravery.

She felt no need to ask his name. In his eyes and mouth she saw her own lost child restored to babyhood. She went all mother and caught the squirming youngster to her breast. He patted her cheeks with hands warm and soft, and kept up his gurgling:

"Such a pretty, pretty boy!"

His delight thrilled Sally so that she took no shame to herself, but the man expostulated:

"But, son, that isn't a boy; that's—that's—"

The child stared from his father to the prince in whose arms he rode. His little brows were befuddled. And then Sally said it.

"I'm your grandmother."

The word was out. The secret published. Unconsciously Sally gathered her mantle about her, and the boy she had played vanished as in the cloak of a magician.

The child threw about her the arms of possession. He had found what his lonely little soul was pining for, and he hugged her till he hurt.

Sally buried her lips in the pink of roses of his fat neck, and she, too, felt the rapture of possession, the joy of being needed.

When she raised her eyes there were tears in them, but they were like jewels, like rescuing rain. She found herself facing her mirror, and she gazed without fear of what it might reflect—now or ever.

She knew the worst, and it was good.

XII

THE DAUNTLESS BOOKKEEPER

UNDER the green eyeshade—under the thick eyeglasses under the green eyeshade—under the heavy eyelids under the thick eyeglasses under the green eyeshade under the green drop light, the bookkeeper's weary eyeballs shuttled to and fro. He could not strike his trial balance. It was just ten thousand dollars askew.

Inasmuch as the total business of Spiegel's Owego Emporium for six months would not have reached that sum, the bookkeeper was worried, and worse.

It was late—so late that it was early. By ten o'clock nearly every light in the business district of Owego was out, except the green drop light over the long-legged desk where Horace Wadhams sat among his lank limbs like a huge, broken umbrella. He was studying a ponderous volume of his own composition. For hours and hours he added, and re-added, and re-re-added, cords of columns, but he could not find the missing ten thousand dollars.

And so he moiled till the first rattletrap milk wagon went crackling down the street.

Filled with despair, and haggard for sleep, the bookkeeper pushed back his eyeshade, dropped down from his eyrie, and went to the window. The starless sky looked like an ocean upside down, and that reminded him of the romance he had been

reading the past few days in what little leisure bookkeepers enjoy. It was Jules Verne's *Ten Thousand Leagues Under the*— All of a heap, Wadhams realized where the mysterious ten thousand had come from. His subconsciousness of the story had obtruded itself on his work, the wires had crossed, and he had absent-mindedly tucked the ten thousand into a crevice in his addition.

This thing had happened before. While he was submerged in the tale of *The Count of Monte Cristo*, he had caught himself beginning a column with the fatal "One! Two! Three!" On another occasion he had found himself entering in his daybook, among such items as "Mrs. L. K. Schuster, two rolls oilcloth," "Mrs. N. C. Hassett, six yards insertion," "N. C. Peabody, one lawn mower"—among such items he had caught himself inserting: "Henry M. Stanley, six crocodiles, four natives, three rhinoceroses." It had taken a deal of work with the ink eradicator to efface this dangerous aberration.

For, while a rolling eye and an absent mind may be a fine thing in a poet, they are not pardoned in a bookkeeper.

Horace Wadhams was underpaid and overworked at the Emporium, and he was underfed and overlodged at Mrs. Magoffin's boarding house. But the rag carpet in his little bedroom was a magic carpet, and of evenings, as he sat creaking precariously in a wicker-bottomed chair, with a book from the circulating library between the long, sharp elbows on his long, skinny legs, the genie of imagination swept him through the walls and out across the world. The rag-carpet genie had an incongruous passenger

in Wadhams; he was as grotesque in his store clothes as Don Quixote in his tinware, but his soul was as high and his fancy as free.

Wadhams affected especially books of adventurous travel. He knew more about forbidden Tibet than he did about Broadway. He would have been lost in Central Park, but he could have taken you by the hand and led you across Africa in the track of Livingstone on a cloudy night. Though he drank nothing stronger than the partial coffee or the pallid tea of Mrs. Magoffin, he saw strange shapes wherever he looked. Across his ledgers at times ran trumpeting elephant herds; in his inkstand coiled an inflated cobra; with his pen he speared many a deadly *fer de lance.*

At the boarding house, if he spoke at all, it was of exploration or adventure; his table talk was spiced with picturesque words like assegai, ice floe, felucca, mushroom bullet, quetzal, iguana, sandalwood, copra, coral atoll, simoom, and lagoon.

The most scandalous thing Wadhams did was to stay home from church. He did this so regularly that it was almost a religion of itself. But he did not waste this period on the bulky Sabbath newspapers that came up from New York; he spent it in the company of wilderness threaders and horizon-haters.

And so he lived his life unhonored, unsung, unmarried, and unimportant. Aside from his book voyages, his travels were confined to the trips up and down his ledger columns and to that stretch of sidewalk between the boarding house and the Emporium, though he sometimes varied this by walking a block or two out of his way—"for exercise."

His was a life of double entry. In that boarding-house cell he fought maddened pumas with a woodman's ax; he scaled ghastly precipices where his least whisper would have brought down avalanches; he staggered across alkaline hells, mumbling with split lips and black tongue for water, water, water; he found whiskered tarantulas under his pillow; he saw the one-eyed octopod leering at him and thrusting snaky arms from under his bed; he heard the first greedy flames snickering in the fagots of the cannibals (or, as he preferred to call them, the anthropophagi); down the early morning streets of Owego he heard the black wolves come howling and hungry; under his door he heard the sniff of the famished leopard; and if a branch of the maple tree outside swished at his window, he shuddered lest a shaggy pygmy be perched there with poisoned blow gun aimed. It was more than Mrs. Magoffin's food that kept him thin and sharp.

But all his adventures were by proxy. He never had anything deserving the name "event" that he could call his very own. And then one day, one long-delayed day, something actually happened to him. A distant relative became still more distant, leaving her dear kinsman an altogether unforeseen legacy of fifteen hundred dollars. The shock was so great that Wadhams came near joining the distant relative.

The effect on his boarding-house status was nothing short of revolution. Mrs. Magoffin put butter in his coffee at breakfast and offered him a second dish of cherries at supper. But—and this you will hardly believe—when he walked into the Emporium and reached for his alpaca desk coat, the proprietor, Mr. Spiegel, said:

"Good morning, Mr. Wadhams."

This was almost more exciting than fifteen hundred dollars. Wadhams could hardly hold his pen for thinking of it. To cap it all, the proprietor took him to dinner at Shanahan's Bonanza Restaurant. There Mr. Spiegel told him that he had always liked him and his work, and that, as a favor to an old friend, he would sell him an interest in the business.

But Wadhams knew the business—from the inside. So he declined, with many apologies. Then Mr. Spiegel graciously offered to borrow the fifteen hundred on a long-time loan at 6 per cent. Wadhams mentally computed the interest at ninety dollars a year, with a fair chance of getting neither it nor the principal. So he declined once more, with profuse apologies and perspiration.

Mr. Spiegel's temperature dropped twenty degrees Fahrenheit, and he said:

"Vell, I metch you to see who pays for the lunch."

Wadhams did not believe in gambling, but he matched, and paid. His fortune was now reduced to fourteen hundred and ninety-nine dollars and forty cents. He realized that he must avoid ruinous hospitalities.

Many days passed while Wadhams wondered what to do with his fortune. Much advice was given him, most of it involving a commission of some kind for the adviser. But Wadhams shook his head.

He had a letter from his mother, who lived on a farm at Oscawana. She advised him to apply the money to the mortgage on the farm. But as the mortgage was fourteen hundred and fifty dollars, and had lived so long, he decided not to impoverish himself in vain. He sent his mother a note of filial

regret, and a hat which he bought at cost price at the Emporium. His fifteen hundred was now fourteen hundred and ninety-one dollars and thirty-one cents.

Once a bookkeeper always a bookkeeper, Wadhams pondered. Fifteen hundred would not suffice to lift him from his estate for more than a few months. It would dribble away in inconsequential luxuries, the mere sweetmeats of pleasure which have no sustenance and leave a sour taste. While he was fretting over his good luck, a new book on Africa appeared at the library. He got it. He read the first chapter. Then he slammed the volume shut with an irreverence that was almost sacrilege in such a book worshiper as he. He leaped to his feet, emancipated. With one fierce gesture he flung off the shackles of literature. He was through with books. He was done with hand-me-down adventures. He had more than fourteen hundred dollars in cash and he was going forth for to get some experiences of his own. As for books, he would write one himself. He spent several delicious hours dreaming over a title for it. *My Adventures in Africa*, by Horace Wadhams. That looked good. *African Adventures* was also good. *Wadhams in Wildest Africa* was better yet. He could hear people asking for it at the library, where he had asked for so many other people's books:

"Excuse me, Miss, have you got Wadhams's *Wildest Africa?*"

"I'm sorry, but it's out."

"Seems to me a library like this 'd ought to have more 'n one copy of such a book."

"More 'n one? Goodness me, we have six; but they're always out. Three copies are at the bindery now being rebound, after being all wore to pieces."

He would dedicate it, of course, to the memory of the distant relative who had given him Africa and immortality. He spent several delicious days writing the dedication. Two or three of his attempts were in verse, but he found that poets had to plod, so he decided to stick to prose.

He could see the reviews of his book, especially in the Owego papers. How the Owegans would talk about him! People who hardly knew him would claim kin. Probably they would put a memorial tablet on the boarding house, and his tall stool would be chipped away by souvenir hunters. The magazines would publish pictures of the sidewalk—"his favorite stroll."

The only fly in the ointment of this rapture was the fear that he might not live to finish the book. He might perish at the hands of a Mbuti warrior, some treacherous Aruwimi chief might transfix him from behind his wicker shield, the tusk of a charging rhinoceros might disembowel him, or he might be macerated by the flaillike tail of a crocodile or end as a ragoût in the kettle of a Mpongwe tribal feast.

Still, it would be dying the death. Better to die than never to have lived. Better to let his bones bleach in the jungle than to let his heart fossilize at Owego.

He resigned his job. That was the first great draught on his courage, but he believed in burning his bridges behind him. He set forth for New York and there was a piece in the paper about it; he was called "our distinguished fellow townsman, long identified with the enterprising Spiegel Emporium, which has long been one of Owego's most flourishing institutions, a favorite resort of the ladies of our

fair city," etc. There was a little too much about the Emporium. That was because Mr. Spiegel advertised. Wadhams breathed a sigh of relief at fleeing from such venality and such grinding commerce to the great free wilderness.

Wadhams found New York very trying. He had to ask the way so often that he began to wonder what he would do in Africa, where there were no numbered lampposts and no policemen.

He had an evening to kill before his steamer sailed. He went to a roof garden, where an Arab magician with three wives performed some wonderful tricks. Also there was an American lady who performed a "Salome" dance in an imitation of a costume, mostly imitation jewels. Wadhams wondered if anything in Africa could shock him after that.

At the dock the next day he had a trunk dumped on his foot. He limped aboard, and a banging cabin door put his hand in a sling for a week. Later his stomach envied his hand.

His ticket included his food. That was more than Wadhams could do. He ate but little, nor loved that little long.

When he arrived in Liverpool at the end of a week he decided to go to Africa by land. But that turned out too expensive, and he was forced to take ship. At the sight of the greasy waves he came near giving up Africa. He gave up everything else. But when he was nighest to despair he would go to his stateroom and look at his pith helmet and his elephant gun, the field glass and the camera he had bought in Liverpool. They were the guaranties of hope.

The slow old ship went on its scallopy way past historic England, the Abbey, and the Tower, and

all the sights dear to tourists. They were not for Wadhams. Nor did Paris with her gilded mirth lure him from the forthright of his purpose. Rome should not know him, nor even Spain. He was for greater wonders than any Alhambra or Escorial.

The ocean disappointed him sadly. He had counted on assisting in at least one storm at sea. He had read so much of the mountainous waves of Fenimore Cooper, the foam smother of Marryat, the crackling timbers of W. Clark Russell; Morgan Robertson's and Jack London's and Joseph Conrad's tempests had thralled him. But his billows were never high enough to give him anything more than a headache. He saw nothing but tame skies, drizzly rains, dismal fogs, and waves, always waves, and more waves that went by in stupid droves like cattle crowded to a slaughterhouse.

At length, when he was but a wisp of strength, the left shoulder of Africa loomed up along the sea. It gave him new hope, but it was some days before the ship reached Sierra Leone.

Here the vessel paused for a few hours. Wadhams donned his pith helmet, slung his camera over one shoulder, his field glass over the other, and, taking his elephant gun in hand, went ashore, feeling like Vasco da Gama and Diego Cam rolled into one.

He set foot on Africa at last! To his sea-shaken legs it seemed as if the continent were about to tip over under his weight. But he found no chance to use his elephant gun. He found ordinary streets full of ordinary people. He could have wept at the natives he saw. They wore shirts and trousers! They looked and acted and dressed like the negroes of Owego, only less so.

He was glad when the steamer sailed. But the farther towns were not much better. Everywhere, he found simply the discomfort and crudity of American villages gone to seed, or still in a fresh-plank condition. The foliage was tropical, but it did not come up to the pictures. The animals to be seen were the cows and pigs, the hens and dogs of Owego; and if there were any local fauna they revealed nothing that the circuses had not shown him since his boyhood.

He met a few native monarchs, but they were simply replicas of the more shiftless negroes of Owego. They were a little drunker, a little dirtier, a little nakeder, a little smellier, that was all. Their wives were many, but were only like unkempt washerwomen, carelessly clad.

He saw a few native dances. But his trip to the Midway at the Chicago Fair had given him sensations that were not surpassed. He saw an unusual amount of human hide displayed, but it was so unattractive that he regretted the lack of drapery. To a man of his neat habits the evident neglect of the Saturday-night bath was enough to rob this living ebon statuary of any allurement it might have had.

He found that a drunken sot is a drunken sot even if he happens to be called King Palabala. A thatched roof was a slovenly and populous thing in spite of all the traditions. The headdresses of the natives looked better in the photograph than on the skull. Mr. Wadhams believed in short hair and frequent shampoo.

But still, with an undismayed hope, he stalked adventure, lugging the heavy gun that was guaranteed to stop an elephant and double up a leaping tiger.

Finally he reached the goal of his dreams, the storied mouth of the Congo. His revered Stanley had described the region as "barren, uninviting, and sparsely populated." In spite of themselves, the printed words had fascination. To read that a place is "a barren and uninviting mangrove swamp" gave it at once a charm. But the literal truth, seen with the fleshly eye, was appalling.

In desperation he left the towns and plunged into the wilderness, hoping against hope for adventure. Better to be entombed in a lion or a cannibal than murdered with ennui. His heart was stopped once by a terrific scream that curdled through one primeval fastness. He asked a grinning native if it were a maddened tigress. "Nope, him locomotive," was the answer. He never saw a tigress or even a tiger loose. No cannibals noticed him.

Then there was the price of the hunting license. If he had seen a dozen lions he could not have afforded one. He did not even meet a temptation.

The only elephants he saw were like enormously idiotic oxen overworked and disgustingly meek. He lost his way often enough, but polite natives acted like policemen and led him to shelter. He was bitten by flies, gnats, and mosquitoes, but that might have happened in Owego. He got blisters on his feet and tore his trousers, but one native applied to his sole a salve made in Skaneateles, and another mended his trousers with a sewing machine. His nearest approach to death was when he was butted by a trolley car whizzing through the jungle. And yet he labored on, assured that some great event lurked behind the next cocoa palm or lay in wait just across the nearest yam farm.

From childhood he had been giving his pennies to the missionary funds. And now he saw what crops those copper showers were raising. He felt like asking for his money back with interest. The missionaries themselves were doleful. They baptized numerous black bodies, but the souls stayed chocolate. Civilization had brought all its attendants. Natives learned to speak English in order to lie in another language. They were schooled in new vices, new cheats, new gambles, new crimes. There were churches, but they were like the African Baptist or the A. M. E. churches of Owego; and there were saloons like Owego saloons.

Wadhams made so bold as to invade the dirty hut of one shiny onyx monarch of Gaboon, known as King Jim Smith Bobawa. Wadhams counseled this ace of spades that rum was ruining his people.

The boozy king bleared at him and answered:

"Thasso—'stoo bad—have some wit' me."

Wadhams evaded the rum, but he had to sit through a concert. Even this was not of barbaric music, for the delighted natives had welcomed the labor-saving device of the phonograph. And poor Wadhams must squat on a dusty mat and listen to raucous records of old times, stale even in Owego, and not improved by rough usage. He had come to Africa to hear again "The Letter that He Longed for Never Came," "In the Baggage Car Ahead," and "I Hear You Calling Me!"

He heard Owego calling him. There was that odious ocean to do over again, but on the other side of it was home.

Never was a man more disappointed than Horace Wadhams. His fifteen hundred dollars was going,

going, almost gone. His Africa—his fabled Africa—had yielded him nothing but novel stenches, bad beds, bad meals, and boredom. Never an adventure, never a chapter for his book.

He would return to the Emporium and ask Mr. Spiegel for his job again. At least he could have the uncertainty of hunting down his wild and elusive trial balance. Perhaps the old charm of adventure would come back to him through the inverted telescope of the printed page.

Wadhams began to believe that literature is to many people what stained glass is to little churches; it takes what the average eye can see only as common everyday yellow sunshine, and weaves it into glory and magic and rainbow resplendence. Charles Lamb was a bookkeeper, and he saw everything prismatically. It was not because Wadhams was a bookkeeper that he could not see Africa artistically. It was because he was Wadhams and he had read too much.

It was a doleful and empty Wadhams who leaned over the rail of the steamer making once more for the right side of the equator. He threw overboard his pith helmet and his white umbrella. He was tempted to jettison also his elephant gun, but he decided that it would look well hung across a couple of nails on his wall at Mrs. Magoffin's. All else he was taking home was a few snapshots. The most nearly interesting ones had come out light-struck or underexposed; the remnant were of such nature that they would hardly do to show in Owego; they would prove shocking without proving interesting. He had not even the material for his dreamed-of stereopticon lecture at the Sunday-school.

When the endless voyage was ended and the steamer sighted Sandy Hook, Wadhams believed that there was no such thing as adventure outside the libraries. How little we know where or when our adventures await us or in what clusters they may come!

The view of the Manhattan sky line, the Gargantuan buildings mountained together at the foot of the metropolis, lifted him from his depression like a sudden gift of wings. The puffing tugs and the waddling ferryboats gave life a lilt. The anchored freighters rusting for paint and sitting high on their red keels while they waited for cargoes, looked to be the very vessels of romance. Wadhams forgot that he had gone farther than they and had fetched home no such merchandise.

The slow warping into the wharf on the Jersey shore was a pageant to him. The hustling stevedores were beautiful when he thought of the pitiful blackamoors swarming about the African coasts. Everything American was more beautiful than the charms of any other continent. His money was nearly gone, however, and he found New York as expensive as it was exhilarating. He posted a letter to Mr. Spiegel and asked him to send his forgiveness to Oscawana, care of Mrs. A. J. Wadhams, R. F. D. 31. Then he took train to his ancestral estates, consisting of several acres and a mortgage. He decided to visit his mother for a few days at Oscawana, while he waited to see if Mr. Spiegel would re-receive the husk-sick prodigal, with or without fatted calf.

Even Oscawana had changed a good deal since he had left it, but there was a reminder of boyhood days in the billboards and dead walls, which were alive

with the circus posters of one of the numerous greatest shows on earth. One huge picture represented the wilds of Africa. It was a conglomeration of ferocious animals: a lion leaping into the gaping jaws of a crocodile; a cannibal in the coils of a boa constrictor; a tiger making ribbons of a goring rhinoceros; an elephant with a leopard in his trunk while a hippopotamus crunched his hind leg; a Zulu in death wrestle with a gorilla—all in one scene.

Wadhams smiled—the smile of one who has been there.

The hack driver explained that a circus was in the town the day before and had driven away early that morning. It had a grand menagerie, he explained. He asked what kind of a weapon Wadhams had in the case, and Wadhams showed him the long express rifle that had neither suffered nor done any harm, and the unbroken box of cartridges guaranteed to plow a widening furrow through a whale.

Peaceful thoughts wooed Wadhams as he recognized the haunts of his barefoot boyhood, the trees from which he had fallen, the swimming hole in which he had come so near drowning, even the schoolhouse to which he had expected to return as President of the United States. He sighed to think that he was returning only as a jobless bookkeeper in seedy clothes. But his mother—bless her heart!—she would be glad to see him any way he came.

He wondered where and how he would find her.

As they topped the last hill, he saw her—in the last place he could have dreamed.

She was sitting on the roof of the farmhouse; in the farmyard below stood a lion, a tiger, two elephants, and a cougar.

Wadhams and the hackman looked at each other. The horses looked at each other, sniffed the foreign odors from afar, and whirled so quickly that they spilled Wadhams and his armament into the road. They disappeared in a cloud of dust, the hackman assisting their speed with willing whip. As Wadhams sprawled on the ground he fully expected to wake and find himself in bed or just out of it. The old homestead mixed with the circus lithograph come to life had no claim on reality. Then he noted that the lion was pacing majestically and roaring in huge grunts, while the tiger was making ineffectual attempts to leap to the roof, where his mother sat huddled. Her shrieks were no dream.

Wadhams was much too scared to run away. Besides, that was his mother there—the only mother he ever had. There was nothing to do but unlimber and get into action. He had lugged that elephant gun all over Africa. Now was its chance to prove itself.

He loaded it with hands composed of ten thumbs, and tried to remember all the rules he had ever read about the art of accurate aim. Then he crept down the hill and up to the fence, and drew bead on the bounding tiger. He pulled the trigger and went over backward. So did the lion.

The tiger continued to spring in the air. Wadhams was puzzled. Then he calculated hastily that if, by aiming at a tiger, he had killed a lion, the way to kill a tiger was to aim at a cougar.

It did not work. He tried it twice in vain, his second bullet taking a brick from the chimney over his mother's head. He reloaded and fired again and again. The tiger leaped and snarled, oblivious of

the bullets, while Wadhams crept nearer and nearer, firing always.

The eighth shot at the tiger nipped the cougar, and he sped for the horizon on three legs. The tiger grew wearier and hungrier, leaped and leaped like a dying flame. He did not heed the approach of the desperate Wadhams, until finally, blind with frenzy and realizing that he had only one bullet left, he ran straight for the striped fury and, jamming the muzzle of the gun into the big cat's very ribs, blazed away. The result was a smell of singed fur and a dead tiger with a porthole through him.

Now Wadhams and his elephant gun were confronted by an angry elephant—by two angry elephants, in fact. But there were no more of those famous mushroom bullets. Wadhams was too crazed with excitement to know what he was doing, but a pale-faced witness peeking through a knothole in the woodshed saw that, after casting about vainly for an elephant hook, Wadhams seized a garden rake and dug it into the nearer elephant's jaw, after the manner of a mahout. The amazed mammoth shivered with respect and suffered himself to be led into the barn, whither he was dutifully followed by the other elephant.

Wadhams was then seen to issue from the stable, bolt the door calmly, and calmly carry a ladder to the side of the house. He assisted his mother to the ground with the grace of a Sir Walter Raleigh.

She started to faint, but her son, having finished his work, fainted first. The man in the woodshed came forth, and simultaneously, from behind a dozen rail fences, came various circus people who had remained in discreet retirement, less afraid of the ani-

mals than of the terrible figure of Wadhams and the blazing elephant gun with which he had eventually destroyed several thousand dollars' worth of no longer live stock.

The leader of the circus gang demanded damages for his dead; but the pale-faced man from the woodshed turned out to be a business man too—a Mr. Joel Crane, the mortgagee of the farm, in fact. He had called on Mrs. Wadhams to demand payment on penalty of foreclosure, when the homestead was invaded by a rabble of mad animals from foreign parts. Mr. Crane had swiftly negotiated the woodpile, while old Mrs. Wadhams, whose motto was rheumatism, had scaled the roof with an agility that won the envy of a distant trapeze artist.

It transpired eventually, after much palaver, that a discharged tent-pegger had taken a sublime and drunken revenge on the proprietor of the circus by opening the cages of several of the animals during a pause to rest the horses. The lion, the tiger, and the cougar had stampeded the elephants, and all had made for the nearest poultry farm, which chanced to be that of Mrs. Wadhams.

Mr. Crane finally got rid of the circus gang by offering to sell them the two elephants in the stable in return for a receipt in full for the useless felines littering the farmyard and cash enough to pay off the mortgage. This was agreed upon after much palaver.

When the circus men departed over the hills with the two elephants meekly lumbering after, Mr. Crane and Mrs. Wadhams carried the bookkeeper within and revived him.

The embarrassment of adventures had been too

much for him after the tedium of his voyage to Africa. He went to bed for six weeks with a well-earned case of nervous prostration and ague—at least the doctor called it ague, but Wadhams knew that it was belated terror for his big game hunt. He was just catching up with his emotions, and he nearly shook the bed apart.

The neighbors had ceased to heroize him long before he was a well man. During his convalescence he received from the owner of the circus a letter praising his pluck and offering him a job as a lion tamer. But Wadhams declined with thanks. He had had enough of real life. Mr. Spiegel was kind enough to give him back his old job. He returned to the keeping of his own books and the reading of other men's.

And now at least once a month, when trial-balancing time comes, you may find him at the Owego Emporium late at night.

Once more under the green eyeshade—under the heavy eyelids under the thick eyeglasses under the green eyeshade under the green drop-light—the book keeper's eyeballs shuttle to and fro as he adds and re-adds and re-re-adds cords of columns.

XIII

YOU HADN'T OUGHT TO

I

MISS CLARASTELLA POSEY, one of the deftest sewing women in Carthage, sat buried waist-deep in billows of white satin. She was stitching a trousseau together—another and a younger woman's trousseau—and her heart was so needled with envy that she turned her head aside lest her tears fall on the woven cream and curdle it.

Not but what she could have been married if she had a mind to. She could have been married at the time when this bride-to-be, this Coralie Bevans, was a little snip in kilts. Miss Posey had been sewing for the Bevanses then, making Coralie's first shoe-top school dresses. On one of the evenings of that period, Horace Clum, calling on Miss Posey, had mastered his Adam's apple long enough to explode a long-prepared proposal in an inarticulate jumble. "Say, Clarastellar, whad joo say 'f I's t' say, 'Le's git married,' huh? Whad joo say?"

The words were homely, but the thought was divine, and Clarastella always remembered how she had answered with demure deliberation—she had to speak slowly to keep her heart from popping out of her lips.

"Why, I guess I'd sa-ay, 'Aw—all ri-ght, Hod.'" Her little whalebone ribs creaked again with

memory of how strong he was. He had big arms and he could throw a mule and he forgot that he was not tightening a cinch round a saddle horse.

He hurt her till she cried, and then he was ashamed and afraid till he almost cried, too. She smiled at the memory of his remorse, smiled so widely that her tears slid down into the corners of her mouth and she tasted them.

She remembered what her mother had said when she told her:

"Well, it's about time Hod Clum was toein' the mark. That rockin' chair he sites in has wore a rut in the porch floor."

Clarastella remembered these things with a brackish smile when she made Coralie Bevans's first wedding gown.

Five years later she remembered them again, for five years later she was waist-deep in Coralie's second wedding gown.

Meanwhile she had sewed on the mourning clothes that Coralie wore for her first husband. She had stitched the tremendous crêpe veil to the profoundly black hat.

Clarastella, working on the second wedding gown, did not turn her head aside to save the fabric from her tears. There were no tears to drip from the dry eaves of her weary eyes. Only the smile was there. She had learned to face life with a dry smile.

A kind of tremor, half giggle and half shiver, agitated her as she mused:

"Coralie had two husbands while I've been getting one, and I haven't got him. Funny thing, life, when you come to think of it! Awful funny the way folks' lives turn out!"

She wondered if she would still be an old maid when the time came to make up Coralie's final nuptial robe. It certainly seemed so, for a few years later there she was again in Coralie's house, making new dresses for Coralie's seven-year-old daughter by her first husband.

Also she was letting out some of Coralie's own clothes, for Coralie was plumper now, more beautiful than ever, perhaps, plump and glowing, at that high crisis of beauty when the flower has reached the fruit and the fruit is ripe.

By this time old Miss Posey was so familiar a presence in Coralie's homes that Coralie treated her like a veteran chair or a section of wall paper. The proof of that came out one day when Clarastella slipped downstairs to ask Coralie if she wanted the buttonholes worked through, or did she want hooks an' eyes on, or maybe would she use patent snappers? She hunted all over downstairs for Coralie and finally peeked into the parlor and said:

"Coralie, do you want I should— Oh, excuse me. I didn't know you had comp'ny."

Clarastella's eyesight was getting a little slow. She had to stare at objects more than sewing-length away and study them a little really to see them.

Now she had a blurred impression that Coralie was breaking out of the arms of a man. Instinctively Clarastella had gasped for pardon and retreated to the foot of the stairs. But as she paused to gather breath for the climb she began to see that the man embracing Coralie was not her husband, but Bruce Imrie.

This hateful fact had to be thought as slowly as

it had been seen. While she stood pondering it she heard Bruce Imrie's voice saying:

"Great Scott! What 'll she think?"

She heard Coralie laugh and say:

"Oh, it's only old Miss Posey. She doesn't think. She can't see farther than the end of her needle."

Clarastella started up the stairs. Coralie's remark was a heavy burden, like a trunk on her old spine. And, besides, she was shaky in the limbs—Miss Posey did not have legs—from the horror of what she had witnessed.

II

Clarastella was bewildered almost more than she was shocked by Coralie's astounding lightness. As a girl Coralie had been loved by many of the young fellows, but principally besieged by Bruce Imrie and Walt Braisted. They had fought for her, and she had pitted them against each other shamelessly. Then suddenly she up and married Walt Braisted.

Clarastella had sewed a good deal for Mrs. Braisted, made the first and second babies' clothes, and turned Walt's cuffs and made his nightgowns, and even mended his socks for the negligent Coralie. She had known how stormily they lived; he drank and she flirted. They quarreled recklessly, and made up, and loved again with outrageous sentimentality, whether Miss Posey were within earshot or eyeshot or not.

Then Walt died and Coralie mourned him fiercely. She could not load the crêpe on thick enough, and she cried desperately. But by and by she was complaining that crêpe was stifling, and finally that it

was depressing! Miss Posey had supposed that that was what folks wore it for.

But Coralie looked grand in black, a lily in an onyx vase, and Bruce Imrie began to flutter round her again. He brought candy for the children and played with them till they grew to love him and to call him Uncle Bruce. Mrs. Posey wondered what Walt Braisted was thinking of that—wherever he was—if he was anywhere. But Bruce Imrie played better with children and widows than he worked among men; he never had any money ahead and owed everybody he could.

Meanwhile Coralie, in her fetching black, fetched a rival, old Alex—pronounced Ellick—Crofoot, who owned the flour mill and real estate and mortgages till you couldn't rest. Bruce Imrie was furious with jealousy and threatened to wring the old miser's neck; but the first thing anybody knew, Coralie confessed that she was going to marry Mr. Crofoot. And she did. Bruce Imrie took on terrible, and demonstrated openly what liquor can do to a man once he devotes himself to it.

Folks made a lot of fun of the Crofoots. Hod Clum called them the worst-matched team ever put in double harness. But he said that old Alex, as usual, got the best of the swap, for she made his third wife, and he was only her second husband.

Clarastella moved over into the big Crofoot house soon after Coralie did. Coralie had been looking to buy her clothes in Chicago and St. Louis now that she was rich, but Alex did not propose that she should squander his savings. He was as close as a steel trap, and Coralie had to call Miss Posey in again. The old skinflint objected even to her. He resented

every stitch that Miss Posey made for Coralie or for the two little Braisted children. He was sharp in his speech with Miss Posey, and Miss Posey disliked him as heartily as she permitted herself to dislike anybody. In fact, she disliked him better than anybody else in town.

She could hardly blame Coralie for not loving the old reprobate. But that was far from saying that she approved of Coralie's allowing Bruce Imrie to begin coming to see her again, and in the daytime when Alex was at his mill. And now the climax had been reached; Coralie was caught in Bruce Imrie's arms. It was inevitable, yet almost unbelievable.

Clarastella was a normal purveyor of gossip. It was part of a sewing woman's prestige and part of her function to keep up a healthful circulation of family secrets. Clarastella had extraordinary means for discovering them, and in the long hours of work her tongue would naturally clack a little.

But there were some secrets that were too wicked for her to publish, secrets that soiled the brain that harbored them, secrets that nice folks could not lay tongue to. Clarastella would never have breathed the Crofoot scandal to a soul except that she had to tell her mother about it when she got home, especially as she wanted advice. She wanted to know if she ought to continue sewing in a house where such goings-on were going on. Old Mrs. Posey treated Clarastella as if she were still a foolish and reckless child. Her own curiosity had been fed, and she had a wealth of town scandals—the only wealth some people have. She answered Clarastella with grimness.

"I guess you're old enough to mind your own business. It's not like as if Bruce Imrie was trying to make up to you. Coralie Crofoot may be bad, but her money's as good as the next one's; and her children got to have duds same as everybody's children, and so has she. Wicked as she is, it would be wickeder to let her go nekked. We need the money and they need the clo'es."

So Clarastella went back to the house of intrigue as timorously as if it were full of ghosts. Coralie, believing that Clarastella had noticed nothing, ignored the incident, and it was more comfortable for Clarastella to act as if it had never happened. But she could not help pondering the contrast with her own lot.

Coralie had had two husbands and two children and a lover, while Clarastella was still engaged to Hod Clum. Hod still came to see her. She was the only woman he ever called on. He was the only man that ever called on her, the only one she ever allowed to come round. Not that anybody else ever tried to storm her front porch, but if they had have she wouldn't have.

III

The reason Hod had never married Clarastella was simple enough. The evening after the ancient event of his proposal he had called on her again. When he came through the gate he let it slam shut after him. That showed Clarastella, waiting on the porch, that Hod was not himself. He stomped up the steps as if he were trying to drive them into the ground. His long face seemed to be a foot longer. Clarastella waited under the shelter of the moon-

flower for him to speak, and he said, without stopping to kiss her:

"You r'member my askin' you last night to marry me?"

"Yes," said Clarastella.

"Well, I got to take it back. I can't get married."

"All right, Hod, if you don't want to," she sighed.

"But I do want to—more 'n anything else on this earth, but I can't."

"Why can't you, Hod?"

"Maw won't let me."

Clarastella had laughed right out in his face, to think of a big lummox like what he was saying such a thing, and him six foot high in his stockin' feet, and his mother a mite of a thing, and sickly at that.

Hod did not smile at Clarastella's raillery. He simply said, in a tone of gigantic agony:

"I can't, Clarastella, that's all. I got no right to! She's m' mother, and she's been a good mother to me, and she's had a hard life, and I got no right to go against her wishes."

Clarastella, in the sudden ruins of her palace, cried out before she could think:

"Nobody's asking you, Hod, to go against your mother. All I ask is, why is your mother goin' against me?"

"Oh, no reason a-tall, no reason a-tall, Clarastella. She thinks you're a good woman and all that, but—well—I guess she's kind of jealous. She was that way with paw. He was away so much of the time on the livery business—it keeps a man goin' all hours—and then he got killed in that runaway. She's had a hard life, like I said, and I'm all she's got. She don't seem to want to lose me."

He was scarlet with shame for such boastfulness, and Clarastella was pale with the shame of seeming to plead her own cause. Still, she had to put herself right enough to say:

"I wasn't allowin' to take you away from her, Hod."

"I know you wa'n't, Clarastella, and I told maw so."

"Wha'd she say?"

"She just began to cry. She kep' sayin' that nobody cared anything for her since paw was took. She said she was useless and in the way, and she wished she was dead. It's a tur'ble thing to see an old woman cry like a little girl's broke her doll, and I said, just to comfort her and git her quieted down, I says: 'Don't you worry, maw, I'll never leave you,' I says. 'I promise you I won't get married long as you live,' says I."

Clarastella could hardly imagine a woman who would not refuse such a sacrifice, but she mumbled:

"What she say to that?"

"She just begun to laugh and take on, and say I was a good boy and always was, and I'd always took care of her and I always would, and nobody could come between us. I never would have thought it, but she's kind of old, you know, and poorly in health, and she 'ain't had much fun. She's wore black for paw now for twenty years. She's awful hard to change, once she gets her mind set on anything."

Clarastella knew that small-town soul and the sublime obstinacies it was capable of. She was not of the sort that butts its head into a stone wall and blames the wall for being stone and for being there. She felt sorrier for Hod than for herself, for he was groaning:

"I'm just nearly dyin' to marry you, Clarastella, but you see how it is. I hadn't ought to—so I can't!"

He was like that, Hod was. "I hadn't ought to," and "I can't" were all one and the same to him.

Clarastella had recognized the granite in his virtue. He was as stubborn in a decision as his mother. She was a Bodine and the Bodines were that-a-way.

She laid down her dreams of marriage as she would lay down a bright fabric she had fancied and picked up and priced in the dry-goods store, and found too costly for her purse. She said:

"I understand, Hod. Don't think anything more about it."

But when she had sent him home she had to run to her mother. Like a little, disappointed girl again, she had to run and fall down at her mother's knee and bury her face in that old lap, and cry.

She had not cried so honestly since she was a little girl and a wagon had run over the mud pies she was baking for her mother. It was an immense relief to have what is called "a good cry." It washed out her sultry heart as a thunderstorm and a torrent of rain replenish a dusty, sweltering air. It gave her courage to face another drought. Perhaps when her strength of endurance was spent it would rain again in her parched soul.

She gave Hod up, but he did not give her up. He tried to stay away for her sake, but the next Wednesday evening he moped past her yard two or three times. She called out to ask him why he didn't come in.

He said he had taken his mother to prayer meeting and he was waiting for her. He didn't feel like going

in himself. Then he began to call on Clarastella every Wednesday night till they changed the prayer meeting over to Thursday, as they had in some of the cities. It was a sacrilegious innovation to many, especially to old Alex Crofoot, who raged:

"They 'ain't changed Sabbath-evening service over to Monday yit, but they're just as liable to as not, with their newfangled, heathenish notions."

Hod called thereafter on Thursday evenings; also on Sunday evenings. He took his mother to church and left her there, and sat on Clarastella's porch during the summer, or in the settin' room when the evenings drew on cold. Just before the meeting would be letting out he would look at his big watch, snap the lid shut with the sound of a cap pistol, and hoist himself to his feet, saying:

"Well, I guess I got to mosey along."

His mother had tried to persuade him to go to church with her, but he drew the line there. He was known in town as a stubborn and godless man. Of course, being a livery-stable keeper, he had little use for sacred words except round the horses and mules. He respected other folks's beliefs and never argued much, but a team of oxen could not have hauled him into a pew. Even when Carthage imported a famous revivalist and he brought to the mourner's bench nearly every other churchless wretch in town, he could not seem to revive Hod Clum.

His mother knew his balky streaks, and even she did not dare to oppose his calling on Clarastella. It hurt her sensitive soul excruciatingly, but she never let on to Hod.

Sometimes, when his mother was especially feeble, Hod would take her to the church in a buggy. At

first he would ask Clarastella to go for a ride with him, and she could not have felt more exhilarated if the hack horse and the rattletrap had been a crimson limousine. But she soon realized that Hod was as weary of driving, when evening came, as she was of needlework. She had no more right to take him driving than he would have had to bring her his torn horse blankets to mend for amusement. So she told him she would rather stay at home. She said it made her nervous to ride.

In the matter of staying home from church Clarastella's conscience was salved by the fact that it was a sacrifice to her.

The gathering of the neighbors, coming to the big barn of a church like twilight cattle swinging back from the pastures, the music, the privilege of lifting one's voice in evensong, the sonorous eloquence of the Scriptures, the siesta luxury of prayer, the comfort of repentance, the renewed promise of mansions in the skies for people who stayed good in their little frame cottages—these were important delights in lives that had no opportunity and no money and no tolerance for moving pictures, balls, cards, theaters, and operas.

Clarastella still had her Sabbath mornings for her own. She taught a class in what she never called the Sunday-school, and she rebuked the blasphemous little curiosities that asked too many questions about Jonah's submarine exploit or Lot's saline wife.

Afterward there was church, and that was the week's great festival.

They had a right good sopranna, had her voice cultervated in Chicago; yes, took two terms of a lady who'd studied abroad or leastways in Noo York.

The organist, Mr. Norman Maugans, played fine, too. He was not stingy with the stops and he had a powerful foot on the pedals, and the pipes roared like what she supposed the ocean would have roared, if she had ever heard the ocean roar. There was the prayer and then the sermon—good long ones. Some folks said old Doctor Melford was the champion long-distance prayer and sermonizer west of the Mississippi, but what did Clarastella care how long he preached? Where had she to go that she should be in a hurry? She had no place to go when he got through, but back home to her maw and the Sunday dinner-getting.

The clothes and hats of the women were an added attraction to Clarastella, too. She was as much interested in what the congregation wore as Doctor Moresmith was in the way they coughed or stayed at home. And then there was the pride of seeing her own work worn by some of the best people. This was like Mr. Maugans's playing one of his own preludes. But most of all there was the unending fascination of studying the back of old Mrs. Clum's head.

Her pew was six rows in front of the Poseys's. She wore always the same bonnet and black dress, and she always dropped off to sleep somewhere between the "Thirdly, brethern and sisters," and the "In conclusion, friends." This was generally recognized as marking a point about halfway along toward the first "Finally," which was followed by several more "In conclusions" and a "Lastly" or two.

The back of a head is one of the mysteries of life, and every Sunday Clarastella used to study the

back of Mrs. Clum's head and wonder what strange creature dwelt inside.

Clarastella had never opposed Mrs. Clum's decision, never questioned her right to keep her son for her very own as long as she could. In her first rebellions against her lot Clarastella had threatened to call on the old lady and tell her that every other mother in town had surrendered her boy to his fate; some of them to more than one.

But Clarastella was of the sort that does not fight. She was of the meek, who are promised the inheritance of the earth. Clarastella never called on Mrs. Clum. The first time Clarastella saw her coming along the street after the proposal, Clarastella was smitten with fear, and turned into the Hendrickses' yard to escape a meeting, and had to lie her way out, since the Hendrickses were sitting on the porch.

Another time she could not dodge, and so the two women spoke to each other, spoke as if there were no bond of rivalry between them. Mrs. Clum sang out:

"Nice day, Miss Posey."

And Clarastella was craven enough to answer, cheerily:

"Little warm, though, Mizz Clum."

And Mrs. Clum rebuked her with, "Got to expect that in July, though."

And Clarastella accepted her slavery.

"That's so."

This brief exchange had settled their public relations. No one could have imagined, seeing them give the countersign of the weather, that the old widow regarded the old maid as the siren who was trying to decoy her son away and leave her lonely

in her age; no one could have imagined that the old maid regarded the old widow as a witch who had put a spell upon her life and denied her the sons and daughters that were her unclaimed heritage from nature.

Mrs. Clum felt that Clarastella was performing incantations, too, praying, no doubt, that she would die. But Clarastella gave no such poison room in her prayers or in her soul. She would almost as soon have stabbed her one enemy as wished her dead. She would have thought the wish as heinous as the crime.

Sometimes Clarastella reached the awful depth of wailing aloud to her mother:

"Oh, I wisht I was dead. What's the uset of me living? Why have I got to go on this way forever?"

Her mother's answer quelled the revolt, if it did not soothe the pain.

"Shame on you for a wicked girl! The Lord put you here for his own good reasons. It ain't for you to set yourself up and ask why."

Sometimes Clarastella's anguish broke out in the presence of Hod. Seeing him slouched enormous in the rocking chair, twiddling his thumbs and saying little or nothing for an hour at a time, the flame of her suffering would burn through her torpor, and she would cry:

"Hod, Hod, I can't stand goin' on like this any longer. If you got any mercy quit comin' to see me! Go get some other girl. Maybe your maw wouldn't ubject to some nice, pirty young girl."

But Hod would shake his head and grumble:

"There ain't any other girl for me, Clarastella. Never was 'n' never will be. I'll stay away if I

bother you, but I couldn't look at anybuddy else. O' course m' mother is m' mother, and long as she's alive I can't marry you; but you're as good as m' wife, and I—I got to—to—" He was trying to say "to love you." It was too delicate a phrase for his uncouth speech. But Clarastella knew what he was driving at.

That was Hod all over. Because she was as good as his wife he naturally had to love her.

So she would rebuke herself before him. She, who had been patience' very allegory, would repent her impatience and say:

"Don't think anything of it, Hod. I got one of those mean disp'sitions. It's lucky for you you're not married to me."

He would say, "Aw, Clarastellar!" And that was about as far as he would get. It meant that she did herself an injustice.

He was as incapable of tender speeches, or caresses, to her as to his horses. He took good care of his horses and he would not permit his men to be cruel, but he gave the animals no caresses.

Sometimes Clarastella's curiosity would overcome her scruples against speaking to Hod of his mother. She would ask him how his mother was. He would usually say that she was poorly.

It seemed a pity to Clarastella that a young fellow like Hod—he was still a young fellow to her, for all his years and solemnities—should be chained to the companionship of so elderly a woman, always so poorly.

"What do you do to pass the time?" she asked him once, and he explained:

"Oh, we have good times together. Maw does

most of the talkin'. She talks mighty good. She's not herself except when she's with me. She's shy before folks and says what she wishes she hadn't, so folks don't really know her for what she is. She's differ'nt with me.

"She's full of fun and jokes about ever'thing; says smart things about people; and remembers lots of stories of old times, the Civil War, and when this part of the country was first settled and the Indians used to come round to the kitchen and ask for food like tramps, and how folks didn't have the luxuries we got now. She's as good as a history and she's got a great sense o' yumor. She keeps me laughing all the time; and she's interested in my business, knows a lot about it, has mighty sensible ideas. She's saved me from lots of mistakes. I'm so hasty, you know.

"And then we read a lot. If I'm wore out she reads to me, but generally I read to her. The evening paper has a stack of good stuff in it. There's the items about folks in town, and the adv'tisements, and the news from the East and foreign parts. And on the inside there's a lot o' useful information. We read the short story and health hints and the funny pictures and jokes. And there's articles about all sorts of things. Las' night she read one to me on 'Diet for Brain Workers' and one on the 'Peanut Industry,' and one on 'Heroes of Liberty.'

"Oh, we have good times. And then she don't sleep very good, and she's always up when I come in from makin' the late train and she has suthin' for me to eat if I want it. She's a mighty good mother, and mighty peart for her years."

Clarastella tried to be glad that he was not un-

happier; but she was knifed by the thought of those laughing and useful evenings, while she moped with her mother, who had no sense of humor and no interest in "Heroes of Liberty." There was more wail than welcome in her comment:

"I'm glad you have such good times. It shows you don't miss me."

"Oh yes, I do!" Hod protested. "I miss you all the time. I can't tell you how I count on these evenings we have together. If it wa'n't for maw's jealousy I'd marry you so quick it would make your head swim. This ain't no life at tall that we're leadin'. It's just like settin' in the hack at the station, waitin' for a train that's late."

IV

As life prisoners in penitentiaries grow used to their narrow cells, forget that they ever had more room, and hardly bother with hope, so prisoners out of jail accept their destinies and somehow endure them. The soul takes on callosities as the body does where it is constantly worn.

Clarastella was like a trusty with the franchise of the prison yard and the privilege of working hard all day to earn repose in the cell at night.

Years and years went over the heads of Clarastella and her lover, till they were habituated to their lot. The neighbors had wearied long ago of discussing them. They themselves had wearied of expecting any change.

And then Clarastella happened in upon the budding scandal of Mrs. Alex Crofoot and Bruce Imrie. Clarastella did not stumble on any more such scenes,

because she took pains not to wander about the house. She wanted to protect her own eyes from such contamination, but her hearing was sharp, if her sight was fading. She could not help hearing sometimes.

The tame business of the seamstress upstairs had suddenly grown as exciting as sitting in the gallery at a melodrama. The suspicious silences or murmurous hours of the communions in the parlor were broken with occasional storms—wild, barbarous wrangles, far more bitter than any that Clarastella remembered ever overhearing between Coralie and either of her husbands. The reconciliations were all the more fervid. Clarastella could not have helped overhearing if she had tried. She did not try. Eavesdropping became the fearful rapture of a child peeking into some forbidden book, kept locked up for years, and now and then carelessly left open on a table.

One afternoon, not long before the hour when the two children would be coming in from school, Bruce Imrie called on Coralie. There was evidently some great excitement. His familiar step on the walk was hurried. He rang the bell impatiently. Coralie went to the door herself. Clarastella heard her gasp, "Why, what's the matter?"

Then they whispered and mumbled, as if they were conspiring. Now and then one or the other would repeat aloud some whispered phrase, and Clarastella heard fragments of their colloquy at intervals that drove her frantic. She stood by the door and listened outrageously and heard shreds of tragedy.

"You took the money? No, ah, no! Why, that's

embezzlement—they could put you in jail for that. . . . It was for me? I never knew that or I wouldn't have accepted. You're trying to throw the blame on me. . . Leave me? No, no, no! I won't let you! I couldn't live without you! . . . I couldn't go with you. You must be mad! . . . Well, I might—but not so soon . . . Must you go to-night? . . . But the children? How could I leave the children? . . . Money, money, money—it's always money! . . . All right, to-night. I'll be there—I'll have my satchel packed—I'll wear my old mourning veil . . . At—eleven—the corner. . . . Yes. . . . You'll be good to me, won't you?"

By and by Bruce Imrie went, just as the children came home skipping the rope, and shouting: "Hello, Uncle Bruce! Hello, mamma! Oh, mamma, she pushed me and I fell in the mu-ud. She did so!" "I did not!"—and the usual antiphonal recital of childish feuds, never so childish to Clarastella as now, when the mother rebuked the older girl and smacked her hand, and then smothered her with kisses when she cried. Clarastella wanted to fly to the rescue of the howling child and to shriek at Coralie:

"You let her alone, now! What right you got to punish anybody for anything? What right you got to strike a child? And you got even less right to kiss her, you with your mouth all red from kissin' Bruce Imrie. You got no right to own a child or a husband or a lover or a nice home like this. You got no right to live! Give me that baby!"

That was what Clarastella shrieked in imagination as she seized Coralie's hands and tore the child from her embrace. But Coralie, lugging her daugh-

ter up the steps and pausing to look in at the sewing room, saw only a little old maid finishing a buttonhole and biting the thread off.

It was fortunate for Clarastella that Coralie did not linger at the door, for she could not have kept up the pretense of obliviousness a moment longer. She was no actress. She would have been horrified to be told that she could be one. She was horrified enough with the hypocrisy that seemed to be forced upon her.

She wanted to escape from the house, but she was afraid to budge until her usual hour. Then she folded up her sewing, took the thimble from her finger, and closed the neat workbasket that was her kit of tools.

She had to tell her mother this new gossip, and her mother felt with her that things had gone past the point where Clarastella should mind her own business and say nothing. But what could she do? All through supper and its aftermath in the dishwater the two forlorn women wondered what they had ought to do. And then, as if the soft and mournful beauty of the gloaming had been gathered into sound, the church bell began to complain.

It was prayer-meetin' night. Hod Clum would be droppin' in in a little while.

V

Clarastella had not mentioned the Imrie affair to Hod. It was too improper a subject for the discussion of an unmarried couple, for, after all, fourteen years of being engaged did not equal one of being married. Besides, she did not like to worry Hod. He had problems enough of his own, with horses

going lame and getting sick, and folks not paying their bills and the price of feed getting higher every day.

But the situation was beyond Clarastella's management. She could neither decide what she should nor what she could do. She needed a husband's advice terrible. Hod would have to be told, so's he could tell her what she'd ought to do.

When he came, and was comfortably established in his rocker, and the heat of the day and the prospects of rain had been discussed, he sheepishly confessed that a newly bought horse, named Fan, had developed a brilliant example of the asthma. The wily dealer had exhibited Fan's paces on an empty stomach with her symptoms suppressed by a sedative. Hod had been taken in by her speed and appearance and he was amusedly ashamed of himself.

When he had sufficiently berated himself for his innocence in buying a horse with the heaves, Clarastella brought up her own bit of news. She began so far back and proceeded with such detail that Hod began to grow nervous. He managed to steal a look at his watch with polite surreptition, but he had to snap the case shut.

That startled Clarastella into an unusually peevish remark:

"I don't care if your mother does have to wait a few minutes for once. She's safe enough in church, I guess. And you got to help me."

"I'm not thinkin' o' my mother, Clarastella. She didn't go to prayer meetin' to-night. She's right poorly. She'll be all right in a day or two, but she's home to-night."

"Didn't go to prayer meetin'?" Clarastella

gasped, as if he had said that the sun was unable to set that evening, but would rise as usual next Friday. The further significance of the fact thrilled Clarastella.

"If your maw isn't to the church, how come you to be here?"

"Oh, maw says she knew you'd be expectin' me and she didn't want to disappoint you, so she made me come on over."

Clarastella's heart swung to Mrs. Clum with a bound. The people who have waited upon us and benefited us all their lives can hardly win, with any extravagance of generosity, such a rush of affection as our oppressors and enemies can gain with one gentle thought, one mere relinquishment of tyranny.

Clarastella's old bitterness spoke impulsively:

"She must be awful sick. I wonder you'd risk leaving her."

"Old Mis' Gormley is settin' up with her and I got to go out later, anyway. But go awn!"

He settled back, and Clarastella went on. She took up Bruce Imrie's intrigue with Coralie. Hod was nearly as shy as she was. But when she spoke of their plan to run away with each other, Hod sat up in a sudden excitement, and began to punctuate her phrases with "So that's it, is it? Uh-huh! So that's it!"

At length Clarastella stopped short to protest:

"So that's what? What you keep saying 'That's it' for?" Hod shook his head.

"Go awn and finish what you got to say, and then I'll tell you what I got to say."

Curiosity stimulated Clarastella to a triumph of brevity. Hod had spoiled her climax with his in-

terpolations, but he had promised her a further installment of the mystery.

When she gave him the floor, he began:

"This afternoon, along about five o'clock, just after the time Imrie would 'a' been leavin' Mis' Crofoot, I guess, he come to my stable and said: 'Mr. Clum, I got to drive up to Wayland Junction,' s' he, 'and take the A. C. & D. midnight to Chicago to-night,' he says. And I says:

"'Whyn't you take the train that leaves here at eight?' s' I; 'you can lay over in Wayland Junction,' s' I, 'like everybody else does from here.' He hemmed and hawed, and he says: 'I can't get ready in time to catch the eight o'clock. I got to be drove up,' s' he. So I says: 'All right, you're the doctor; I'll give you a buggy and a man to bring the horse back,' s' I. But he says, 'A buggy won't do,' s' he, 'there 'll be another—er—party besides myself,' he says. 'Oh,' says I, 'you'll want a hack. That 'll cost a little more,' I says, 'but I'll treat you right.' He says: 'Don't care how much it costs,' s' he, 'providin' I get the train. I wouldn't miss it for a farm. Gimme the fastest horse you got and the best driver,' he says. And I says, 'All right, I will.'"

Clarastella looked at him with wild eyes, and nodded wisely, and she said:

"You and I know who that other party is going to be."

"We do now," said Hod. "That's why I was lookin' at my watch, to make sure I wouldn't miss gettin' back to the stable so's to help harness him up a good horse. I was goin' to give him January Molasses, and Quinine. They'd be sure to make it, but now I don't care whether they make it or not.

I don't like the idea of their usin' one of my teams for such doin's."

"It makes you a kind of pardner in their iniquity," said Clarastella. "I don't see how you can afford to be mixed up in it. Seems like our bounden duty to put a stop to it somehow."

"Yes, but how is somehow?"

"That's what's beyond me. Do you suppose we could report 'em to the police and have 'em arrested?"

"What ev'dence you got to have 'em arrested on?"

"I heard her tell him it was embezzlement."

"Yes, but hearin' tell ain't ev'dence. You can't swear out any warrant against a man on what one woman says she heard another woman say."

"Well, you ought to could. I don't know what better evidence you could want. You men just wait till us women get at these fool laws. We'll fix 'em up so's they'll be practical."

"Mebbe, but that will be just a little mite late for this case."

The riddle floored them, and they sat without speaking for a long time; the duet of their creaking rocking chairs, like two frogs calling to each other, was the only sound.

Hod was so deep in thought that it was Clarastella who noted the alarming progress of the hands on the old clock. Duty compelled her to point them out to Hod. He verified the time by his own watch and snapped the case shut as he heaved himself out of his chair.

The energy of his rise gave him his inspiration. He was so excited with it that he actually kissed

Clarastella good-by and squeezed her shoulders a little closer together.

"I think I got the idea," he said.

"What is it? Tell me!" she cried.

"'Ain't got time," he answered. "It might not work out. I'm goin' to do my best, though."

"But tell me, tell me!"

"'Ain't got time. If you should happen to be settin' up that late, have a lamp burnin' in your window, and I'll come by and let you know."

He hurried away, leaving her frantic.

VI

Bruce Imrie was waiting on the curb. When the hack with the horses pranced up Hod Clum himself was on the box. Imrie had his watch in his hands:

"Oh, it's you, is it?"

"Yep."

"You're late," Imrie growled, as he threw in a suit case.

"Did the best I could."

"Are those the best horses you've got?"

"Fastest team in Carthage. The nigh horse is old Quinine, and the off one I just bought, a Jim dandy. Her name is Fan."

"What do I care what their names are? You get me to that train or I'll break your neck."

Bruce bent his high head and crept into the coach. And Hod laughed, though ordinarily he did not encourage familiarities from his fares. Imrie had his head out in a moment, to say:

"Stop at the corner of Third and Washington for —for another passenger."

"Yep. G'ap!"

At the corner, in the dense shadow of maple trees, stood a woman in a heavy black veil. The disguise identified her. Hod felt a sinking of the heart as Bruce Imrie stepped out and helped her in with a caressing solicitude that sickened the driver.

Not that Hod was opposed to caresses. He envied other people their gifts in amorous gesture, and regretted his own paralysis whenever the occasion arrived where an embrace would be appropriate. He was fond of his horses, but he was ashamed to give them sugar.

An important source of his revenue was the purveying of horses and buggies to young men of a mating disposition. Hod knew that the purpose of a horsanbuggy is to convey a pair of lovers away from the crowds into an outer dualitude where the business of wooing can be transacted.

In spite of appearances Hod Clum was the most active local agent of Cupid, Hymen & Co. He had driven many an eloping couple out of the reach of obstinate parents and under the sheltering palms of the parson. He had driven numberless bridal couples more overtly to churches and to trains. It was the irony of his fate that he who drove such a trade in the transfer of lovers should have been denied the privilege of one of his own horsanbuggies.

But he had never knowingly assisted in the wrecking of a home or an elopement of illicit lovers. And he hated his task now. He consented to it only with an ulterior motive of benevolent dishonesty.

Bruce Imrie kept popping his head out to urge him to greater speed, but Hod would answer back: "Plenty o' time, Mister Imrie. Plenty o' time."

He was as considerate of his beasts as a livery man could be. He knew that keeping horses and humans to their paces, with some variety and relaxation, was better for them than a relentless monotony of jog.

He could hear nothing from the carriage but the rumble of wheels, though he thought for a while that Coralie was weeping and Imrie impatiently consoling her.

A mile or two outside Wayland Junction he drew up the horses near a watering trough and got down from the box.

Bruce Imrie's head came out at once.

"What's the matter now? Break something?"

"Nope," said Hod. "Don't worry, I'm away ahead of time, so I thought I'd feed the hosses a little."

"Stop here to feed horses? Who ever heard of such a thing! You get back up there and drive on."

"Nope, I guess I'll give 'em a snack out of their nose bags," said Hod. "Fan come in from a drive late and didn't get her supper. They's quite a long hill ahead, and she'd like her supper."

"She can have her supper after we get to Wayland Junction," Imrie raged. "You drive on or I'll take the lines myself."

"Say, young feller, whose rig you think this is?" Hod demanded, with truculence. "A mussiful man, is mussiful to his hosses, and Fan gits her supper. If you don't like it, git out and walk, and it won't cost you nothin'. I'll throw in what ride you've had."

Imrie was furious, but Hod could see other arms restraining him, and he could hear Coralie's voice,

pleading, "Don't anger him, Bruce, please, for my sake."

"That's right, Mis—Mis Whoever-you-are," said Hod; "don't let him lose his head."

He set the nose bags before the puffing steeds, and they were soon crunching sonorously. Fan's nose bag had far the larger provender. Hod paced up and down, watching the moon and opening and shutting his watch, while Imrie gnashed his teeth and imagined vain things. When the banquet was finished Hod took off the nose bags, flung them under the seat, and led the horses forward to where a primitive trough carried a runnel of water from a hillside spring down to an old tub. The moonshine gave the trickling stream the glimmer of fluid silver, and it thumped into the tub with as chiming a laughter as if it were the very pool where the hours watered their mystic steeds. It was a wayside altar of a sort, and on hot days and nights thirsty horses bowed their heads there and went thence blessed.

But the mare, Fan, took no benefit from there. Hod was outchuckling the spring. He knew that while, in the heavens, night brings out the stars, among horses a full meal with plenty of cold water brings out the heaves, especially if the meal includes clover hay. And Hod had selected for Fan a *bonne bouche* of clover hay.

He let Fan drink till even she lifted her dripping muzzle from the cold water and shouldered her polemate aside. She seemed content completely, but Hod gave her an uncharacteristic pat on the nose, and mumbled with aching conscience:

"Poor Fan, I hated to do it, but I had to."

Then he climbed to the box and urged the team

against the long ridge that shelters Wayland Junction from the pleasant south winds. Ordinarily Hod nursed his horses up and down a hill, but now, with voice and whip, he caricatured Ben Hur.

Artists think in the mediums they are used to. Michelangelo saw things in terms of marble, and chopped it away with savagery. Cellini dreamed in spouting streams of molten bronze. Shakespeare's thoughts fell naturally into scenes and dialogue. Hod Clum's form of expression was horses, and he used his medium as relentlessly as the other geniuses dealt with theirs. He was cruel, but with a structural purpose.

The snap of the lash and the rataplan of the hoofs sounded good to Bruce Imrie, and his heart galloped with more hope; but presently he heard another sound that disquieted even his untutored ears, a sound of gigantic breathing, a windy expiration of forced breath. Fan stopped to cough, but Hod ruthlessly drove her on with menace of lash and voice. She barked her way to the top of the hill, and then her legs refused to carry her farther.

The hack stopped with a jolt.

After a time Bruce Imrie stepped out to the ground and watched the throes of the equine Camille.

Fan was panting with the utmost violence. She drew in her breath peaceably enough, but she expelled it with immense noise. She was working with a leaky bellows, and the great muscles of flank and belly were lashing and straining to expel the air from the incompetent lungs.

Man or beast, in a spasm of coughing, is a hard sight for the hardest heart to watch. Some huge, invisible, Gargantuan baby seemed to be satisfying

an infantile malice by snapping and twisting and flapping the big jumping jack.

The emotional Coralie was overcome with pity for the wretched horse. She forgot her own discontents before the vision of that dumb sufferer.

Hod's soul was ugly with remorse; he began to believe that the homes and lives of all the Imries and Crofoots in the world were not worth one moment's torment for that mare.

Even Bruce Imrie, who was too sentimental for his own prosperity, would have felt more pity for Fan if he had felt less for himself. Catching that train was all-important. From the height where they stood he could look across a valley to the little town of Wayland Junction. So nearly all of the lights were out that the few illuminated windows aroused suspicion; one wondered what those miscreants were up to who dwelt behind them.

Imrie looked at his watch. There was little time to waste.

"How long is that old fool going to cough?"

"Ask her," said Hod.

"How long does she usually act like this?"

"I 'ain't had her but a short while," said Hod. "First time she was attacked it lasted quite a spell. Second time it wa'n't so long."

"How long is quite a spell?" Imrie snarled.

"That depends," said Hod.

"Why in hell—pardon me, Coralie—did you have to wish the old hatrack on me?"

"She ain't no hatrack. She's a mighty strong hoss. Otherwise she couldn't stand the wear and tear she's gettin' now. Look at her. Ain't she strong? You asked for the fastest team I had, and

them two can make better time than any other pair I got. Fan don't often disappoint me."

"But you promised to get me to the train."

"Well, I got you within footin' distance of it. If you light out now you can make it." He opened and closed the clam shell of his watch.

Imrie seemed to be gargling his throat, but it was with curses. Then he turned to Coralie.

"Do you think we can do it, dear?"

"How far is it?" Coralie faltered. "It looks terribly far."

Hod answered:

"It's a good two mile or mebbe more. And it would take right smart of running to make it."

"Great heavens! I never was able to run or walk very far, and I have on high-heeled shoes, and my heart is acting funny."

Hod spoke with assumed surprise.

"Why, if it ain't Miz' Crofoot. Just ridin' over to the deepo with Mr. Imrie, eh? Well, since you'd be goin' back, anyway, no use runnin' all that distance. Tell him good-by here and leave him hike. Fan 'll be calming down before long, and I'll get you back home safe and sound as a new dollar."

Coralie was thrown into utter confusion by Hod's recognition and by his apparent unconsciousness of her guilty plans. She could not answer him.

Hod walked away and devoted himself to stroking Fan and talking to her. Even his slow brain imagined what was being said by the whisperers in the gloom. There were groans and sobs, and repeated embraces and outcries against their lot, and promises of reunion later.

Then Imrie darted from Coralie's arms and ran

down the hill; he ran awkwardly, his heavy suit-case knocking against shin and calf and throwing him off his stride. In the dim light the local Apollo looked grotesque and poltroon and fugitive. He had forgotten to pay for the ride, but Hod did not add his voice to the pitiful wails that Coralie was sending out into the dark after him. "Good-by!" and "Good-by!" and "Good-by!"

Once or twice Imrie's voice came back choked and breathless. Then he was lost. All was shadow and silence. Even the worn-out horse ceased to cough, and drooped dejectedly.

Coralie—alone, dismayed, abandoned—was silent, too, staring off into the sea of moonlight that drowned her lover and staring back into the sea of moonlight that swallowed her home, her children, and her husband. Her past was to be her future, and she was afraid of it. Suddenly she buried her face in her hands, and sobs bent and racked her delicate frame, as if the Gargantuan baby had flung the toy horse aside and had taken the doll for the next plaything to torture.

Coralie stumbled and staggered in her blind frenzy. Hod longed to comfort her, but did not know how. At length she fell against him. His arms went round her to support her, and stayed there. He patted her back as if she were a sick horse.

The tormentor tired also of Coralie at last and flung her down. She was as calm and unresisting as a broken toy. She could cry no more. She faced her life clear eyed and resigned, but without resource. She felt in her heart that she would never see Bruce Imrie again. She dreaded to go back to her deserted home, but she had no other shelter.

"Better git in now," said Hod.

He opened the carriage door for her, but she shrank from entering the black cell alone. A few minutes before it had been a sedan of romance. Now it was an empty grave.

Hod had one of the few inspirations of his life.

"Maybe you'd ruther ride up there with me, seeing it's such a fine night."

Coralie stared at him in amazement at the suggestion.

He added:

"Nobody ain't goin' to see you."

That made its usual all-important difference. Riding on the seat of a hack with a driver was ridiculous, but riding alone in that dark and bouncing closet was intolerable. Hod helped her up. She was prettily awkward and timid and he enjoyed his superiority. Perhaps if Clarastella had cried on his breast and been helpless she would have won him long before, in spite of his mother.

Hod clambered to his place, turned the carriage round, and set out with all the exultance of a shepherd bringing back a ewe lamb he had torn from a wolf.

Hod's heart was full of moral lectures and common sense, but his tongue could not express them. That was to be Clarastella's share in the rescue.

By and by they heard the faint hoot of the midnight express drawing into Wayland Junction. There was a pause, then the train started up again and rattled off into oblivion, with the peculiar clatter of distant trains purring through spacious country midnights.

Both Coralie and Hod wondered if Bruce Imrie

had caught the train. They had a feeling that he had. They seemed to see him swing aboard the last platform, breathless, but secure.

At length the hack reached the outskirts of Carthage, its lampposts like watchmen fallen asleep with lanterns held up. Now and then a vague pedestrian moved belatedly abroad. Coralie thought that she would better get down and ride inside. As Hod was handing her in she was attacked with a new onset of fear. She forgot Hod's fiction of her errand, and whispered:

"I—I'm afraid—afraid to go ho-home, Mr. Clum. My hus-husband will have missed me. He may—may have told the police, or he may have locked the door—the door against me."

Hod had not thought of old Alex Crofoot in the rôle of the belligerent husband. He had hardly thought of him at all. He stood nonplused. Then he bethought him of Clarastella, waiting up, doubtless, to hear the news. This was a woman's business. He said:

"You come right along over to Miss Posey's house."

"But I can't wake her up!"

"I got a notion she'll be awake. We can drive past, anyway, and see if there's a light."

Coralie's poverty of wits consented, and she stepped in. Hod mounted the box, and the hoofs of the team troubled the somnolent streets. To Hod's relief Clarastella's light was burning. He threw to the ground the weight that held the horses, climbed down, opened the door for Coralie, and whispered:

"Miss Posey's up."

Miss Posey was not up. She was asleep by her

lamp, and when she heard the stealthy knocking on the door she woke with a start, stared about, shivered, looked at the clock, accused it of having stopped the afternoon before, then decided that burglars were knocking for admittance.

At length she remembered, and hurried to the door. To her amazement Hod was not alone. He brought with him the forlorn Coralie, the pretty little employer who was now her suppliant. It was Coralie's first call on Miss Posey.

But the Coralie whom Hod had put into his carriage at the outskirts of the town was not the Coralie he took out. The few minutes in the dark had set her back in the spell of Bruce Imrie, whose ghost was there. Hod mumbled to Clarastella:

"Miz' Crofoot is afraid Mr. Crofoot has locked her out at home, and she wants you to advise her how to git back."

But Coralie said:

"No, no, I don't want to go back to him. I won't! I want Miss Posey to keep me here till the first train for Chicago, and I want Mr. Clum to come for me with a closed carriage and take me to the train."

She had a plan now, and she was again the exigent, imperious Coralie. She added:

"Also, I'd like to borrow some money. I'll send it back as soon as I see Mr. Imrie."

Hod and Clarastella both sat down and left her standing, like an unsolvable riddle.

VII

It was strange that the business of such a woman should have to be transacted with such a couple.

Hod's mind went first to the money question. He grinned at the thought of Bruce Imrie giving Coralie money to send back to pay a loan. Bruce Imrie did not believe in paying money back; he believed in paying it forward. He owed nearly everybody in town. There was an old yellow account against him in Clum's books. He had not paid for his last ride. He had not remembered to give Coralie the money to pay for it.

With money as tight as it was, there was small inducement to use it for financing the wrecking of Coralie's life. Hod spoke first. He said:

"It ain't likely, Miz' Crofoot, we're goin' to pay your expenses for any such foolishness."

"You won't lend me the money?" Coralie demanded, in amazement.

"Not so's you could notice it," said Hod.

"Why not?"

"I ain't sure of your s'curity."

"Take these two rings, then." She pulled from her fingers an ornate jewel, and a wedding ring, and said: "Mr. Crofoot gave them to me. I don't want them any more."

Clarastella had found such difficulties in achieving a plain gold band that she marveled at the ease with which wedding rings slid off and on the fingers of Coralie. Hod rejected the pledges.

"I'm afraid those there belong to Mr. Crofoot as soon as you're through with 'em."

Coralie turned from him, in disgust, to Clarastella.

"Miss Posey, will you lend me the money? You must have saved a good deal!"

The notorious ant was greatly flattered by the appeal of the beautiful locust, but she dared not

grant it. It was not stinginess, but conscience, that forbade. It cost Clarastella a great pang to deny herself the splendor of tossing money to the aristocrat.

Instead, Clarastella said to the indignant Clum:

"Hod, you better run along home now. Your maw will be worryin'. I'll take care of Miz' Crofoot."

Hod beckoned her to come to the door, and whispered:

"Don't you give her one cent; you'll never get it back."

"Go on home," said Clarastella. "You've done your share."

Hod took the horses back to the stable and found that his mother had been sending messages for him with increasing urgency. Miss Gormley had been to the stable three times.

He stopped the stableman, who was about to unharness the horses, and drove out home at all the speed he could lash from the weary team.

Meanwhile Clarastella and Coralie had worked their way into sufficient familiarity for the conference to develop into a bitter wrangle. Clarastella insisted on Coralie's going home. Coralie was driven at length to the bluntness of saying:

"Miss Posey, you're getting impudent to me. Please mind your own business and let me mind mine."

Clarastella answered her as if she were sticking needles into Coralie.

"Mind your own business, you say? Do you mean I'm to turn you out into the street and go to bed? Let you mind your business? Well, why

don't you? It's just about time you was quittin' this foolishness and settlin' down to your business. Your business is your husband, and you better mind him."

"But I don't want to go back to my husband; I do want to go to Mr. Imrie. How many times do I have to tell you?"

"You don't have to tell me once; but there's one thing I wisht you'd tell me."

"What's that?"

"That's where did you get the notion that what you want to do is what you ought to do. Most of the time it's the exact opposite. You take my advice, and suspicion everything you want. You leave out that 'I want' business and pay a little more attention to 'I hadn't ought to.' Look what you've had, Coralie. You've been Bevans and Braisted and Crofoot, and you want to be Imrie—and I'm still old Miss Posey. You got children and looks and money. And what have I got? O' course you'll say a homely old thing like me 's got no right to those things, but it's not fair that you should have all the good looks and all the husbands in the world. You've got children, and they've grown past bein' toys for you to play with. They got rights, and it's high time you was teachin' them their hadn't-ought-tos and their I-wants. They'll keep you busy if you'll tend to 'em instead of gallivantin' all over the country with that swindlin', lyin', sneakin' Bruce Imrie.

"It won't be long before he'll see some other woman that's pirtier than you are, because they keep making the pirty ones fresh every day. Then he'll say 'I want it,' and throw you into the ash barrel.

And what right 'll you have to complain, for you'll find in that same barrel the children and the husband you threw there yourself."

For the first time Coralie compared herself with Clarastella, as a human being equally eager for the riches of experience. She had assumed that Clarastella had not lived because she lacked the will and enthusiasm. She had known, as everybody in town had known, that Hod Clum's mother had kept him from marrying Clarastella. She had seen that they took the matter with outward calm. Therefore she rated their martyrdom as indifference. Their elopement and marriage would have been so easy and lawful an adventure that their failure to take it seemed mere cowardice.

Now she realized that they had not let I-ought-not wait upon I-want, because they had accepted the demands of another as their own duty. That was the true altruism.

And now Coralie saw also herself otherwise, no longer as one whom life had used cruelly and denied much, but as a glutton whom nothing could appease. Her romantic tears and wails for Bruce Imrie became the contemptible whining of a greedy feeder calling, "More! More!" and never, "Enough!"

She had always spilled the sweets she had in clutching at those that were beautiful, because they were at the other side of the table.

She compared her gormandizing with the husks that Clarastella had chosen. Coralie decided that it was time to push back from the feast and get to work.

'I'll go home," she sighed, and Clarastella caught her in her arms with sudden love. Coralie added:

"But how can I get back? My husband is an awful strict man."

Now that they were on this lofty moral plateau it seemed impossible to deal otherwise than honestly. So Clarastella urged:

"Go to your husband and tell him the truth, and ask him to forgive you."

She felt Coralie's lithe body turn to marble in her embrace, and she heard the old accent again in Coralie's voice:

"I wouldn't ask the old miser for forgiveness if it was the last act of my life! I'd rather die. And if I did ask him he'd turn me out, or else all my life he'd treat me like dirt."

Clarastella groaned. Folks were hard to manage. Angels are not made out of folks all at once, and angels have to be among angels to shine. Clarastella felt that Coralie was right about old Alex. The erring wife was not yet saint enough to drop to her knees, and if she did the husband was not saint enough to lift her up.

A trick would have to be played. It would take time to work one out. She looked at the wax-wan beauty and said:

"You'd ought to lay down, Coralie. You're just naturally wore out. Get off your shoes and corsets and stretch out on my bed!"

Coralie was reformed enough to murmur:

"But what 'll you do?"

"Oh, I'll take the sofa. It's fine. I always use it when I take a nap."

The much-married Coralie crept into the old maid's bed and fell asleep. Clarastella always hated the horse-hair sofa, and it hated her. It was a

slippery perch that seemed to be always trying to slide her to the floor. But she kept herself aboard and somehow resumed her sleep. When she woke her plan lay all ready-made in the back of her head.

She washed her face and hands and tidied up her hair. She took a peek at Coralie and found her as pretty and innocent as any dreaming child—as perhaps she was.

Clarastella went to her mother and found her just groaning out of bed. Clarastella pushed her back.

"Don't get up, maw! Stay right there!"

"Why?"

"Maw, you're awful sick."

"I am not."

"You got to be."

"Why?"

"I 'ain't got time to explain till later. But you been awful sick all night and Coralie Crofoot has nursed you."

"I haven't laid eyes on her."

"She's in my bed now, all fagged out from nursin' you. You do as I tell you, and tell anybody that asks what I told you."

Then Clarastella walked out.

She left her mother convinced that one or the other was insane. Then she stole out of the door to invade the awful presence of Alex Crofoot. She saw him coming along the street. He was haggard and ashen and his step was feeble.

Alexander the Tight had had a bad night. The beauty that he prized in his way, with all the soul he had, had been absent from his home. Suspicions and dark plans of divorce had given him no comfort.

He did not want an ugly revenge; he wanted his pretty wife. He cherished her as miserly as his gold, and now she was gone. The town would laugh at him. He felt wrecked and abandoned.

Clarastella hailed him as he passed her gate. She took her lies with a rush.

"Mornin', Mr. Crofoot, I was just on my way to your house. I'm afraid you been worryin' about your wife. Fact is, my mother was taken awful bad all of a sudden last night, and I run over to your house to ask Coralie to let me telephone for a doctor, and she insisted on comin' right over. She didn't think to leave word, and we kep' workin' over mother all night."

Alex muttered, "I saw the lights goin' in your house, but I never thought—"

"This morning Coralie was so dead beat I just put her to bed in my bed. I hope you and the children haven't worried, but she's certainly been our salvation. And maw's consid'able better."

Old Alex Crofoot was clinging to the palings and wavering for a fall. His heartless, sinful, runaway wife was to be restored to him in the guise of a ministering nun. If he had known how he would have sent up three cheers and wept. As it was, his hard old eyes minted two or three tears. They fell from the slots like nickels.

Nothing would do but that he should come in to verify Clarastella's fairy story. He followed so closely that he caught Mrs. Posey out in her nightgown.

Clarastella screamed:

"Maw, how dare you be out of your bed. I declare you're demented."

Mrs. Posey had the presence of mind to limp out rheumatically, and to cough with appalling ardor.

Clarastella gave Alex a stout chair and went to wake Coralie. She held her hand over Coralie's mouth while she told the situation. Then she made Coralie get up and dress. By the time Coralie was ready old Alex was as impatient as a Romeo and he embraced her with an ardor hitherto unknown. He wept a little better now and Clarastella was rejoiced to see Coralie's face soften with a hint of pity. He could not expect love, but it is much if a woman will have a little mercy for her husband.

Coralie was now in haste to get home and comfort her terrified children, and Clarastella was further encouraged. Two emotions and a comfortable house ought to make a marriage last awhile.

She invited the Crofoots to stay to breakfast, but they declined with thanks, and she watched them scurrying home as if they were two of her own children setting out for school—a hard school, but a school.

VIII

Clarastella was frantic now to tell Hod Clum of her triumph as a match mender. She wondered why he did not drop round to inquire. There was no telephone in her house or she would have called him up. When she could stand the strain no longer she resolved to walk past the livery stable on a chance of seeing him. If he were not there she might venture on to the dreadful realm of the deepo.

As she passed the stable, Hod's man, old Bud Shorthouse, who always looked as if the horses used

him for target practice with their hoofs, was washing a buggy.

He gave an indication of touching his hat, and stared at her very solemnly.

After a fierce battle Clarastella spoke to him in a most un-old-maidenly manner.

"Mr. Clum ain't round?"

"Oh no, ma'am. He's not be'n down 's mornin'!"

"He's not sick?"

"No'm."

"Is his mother?"

"No."

"What's the matter of him, then?"

"His mother's dead, ma'm."

"Dead!"

"Yes'm. She was right poorly all evenin' and he was late gittin' home. When he got there she brightened up right smart, they tell me. But she begun to weaken. Heart failure it was, the doctor was tellin' me."

"Did she suffer much?"

"No'm. Doctor said she was holdin' on to Hod's hand, and then she wanted to breathe, and he helped her to set up and put the pillers back of her, and all of a sudden she says, 'Holt on to me tight, honey'; and Hod put his arms round her, and she says, 'You been a good boy, honey,' and she smiled, and—then just naturally died. Yes'm, so the doctor was tellin' me."

He returned to his buggy washing, his eyes dripping like sponges; and he was cursing them under his breath.

There is no loneliness like the loneliness when a strong enemy has left the field. Clarastella felt as

if all the people and houses and trees had been removed from the earth and she left. Old Mrs. Clum was no longer against her.

Her first thought was one of pity for the poor old soul wrenched from the world. Then she smiled to think that Hod had been with her and had won the rare accolade of her blessing for his fidelity. And then the tears came pattering, as she thought of his grief.

She wondered what to do. Impulse said, "Go to him, help him." Habit said: "Keep away. Mrs. Clum don't want you round."

She went back home. She tried to write. Her fingers kept forgetting that the pen was not a needle. What was the use? Hod knew as well as she did what she felt. When he wanted to see her or hear her voice he knew well enough where to find her.

And so, as almost always for herself, Clarastella chose the negative, the self-denying alternative.

She did not see Hod Clum for weeks. The old lady had her way more than ever now. Clarastella did not miss Hod so much on ordinary evenings, but on Thursday and Sunday evenings it was—she admitted it to Coralie—it was kind of lonesome round the house. Worst was the feeling that Hod must be 'most as lonesome as what she was. But he would feel that he hadn't ought to go calling so soon after the funeral, and him taking the funeral so hard, his horses still all wearing little black ribbons.

One lonely, lonely Thursday evening, when the plang of the church bell was sorrowful beyond the bearing, Clarastella heard a familiar footfall on the boardwalk outside. She dared not look, lest it be only imagination.

The next Sunday evening she heard it again. She

peeked through the blinds and saw Hod pacing up and down. She dared not step out on the porch, lest he go away. She watched him from behind the curtains, and her tears dropped one by one, as slowly as his footfalls.

The next Thursday evening she was on the porch when he went by. He waved his hand at her, but did not come back. But the second Thursday he could not help but turn in.

His words were:

"I don't guess maw would mind, seeing as it's prayer-meetin' evenin'."

"I don't guess she would," Clarastella murmured, meekly. "Set down, won't you, Hod?"

He sat down. After a silence he began to talk, to talk about the forbidden subject—his mother—to tell how good she had been, how anxious for him, how jealous, how interesting a talker, and what a sense of humor she had had.

Clarastella felt a great tenderness welling in her for the poor gone soul that had loved too well and wanted love too much, and had only had the one love to draw on.

"I'm glad we let her have her way," she said, and meant it.

And now the old lady seemed to be satisfied. Her opposition melted impalpably away. She came, as it were, to call on the Poseys, to sit and beam upon her son and upon the woman who should look after his comfort, for she loved her son too well to want him homeless now.

With a very gradual progress the marriage plans of Clarastella and Hod began to return to their thoughts, then to their speech.

Of course they had to wait the year out, and it was a long year—one of the longest of recent years—but at last it was gone.

At last Clarastella could be seen waist deep sewing on a wedding dress of her very own. It was not white satin. She did not want to look as foolish as all that came to.

Coralie Crofoot wanted to buy her white satin, but Clarastella was wise. The wedding, she knew, would be joke enough to the town.

And it was. It was a huge joke. Everybody went to the church, invited or not. People said that Hod was a bridegroom, with the accent on the "groom." In his "Prince Albert" he certainly looked every inch the livery-stable keeper. And the poor little old maid at his side looked more an old maid than ever.

Two or three of the women in the pews were purple with amusement, and several of the youngsters giggled so that they had to run out of church. As the newly hitched team walked down the aisle and out of the inferno of embarrassment, there was an audible snicker back of them. But Coralie Crofoot said:

"I envy Clarastella."

THE END

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